

WILD WEST



WEEKLY



A MAGAZINE CONTAINING STORIES, SKETCHES Etc. OF WESTERN LIFE.

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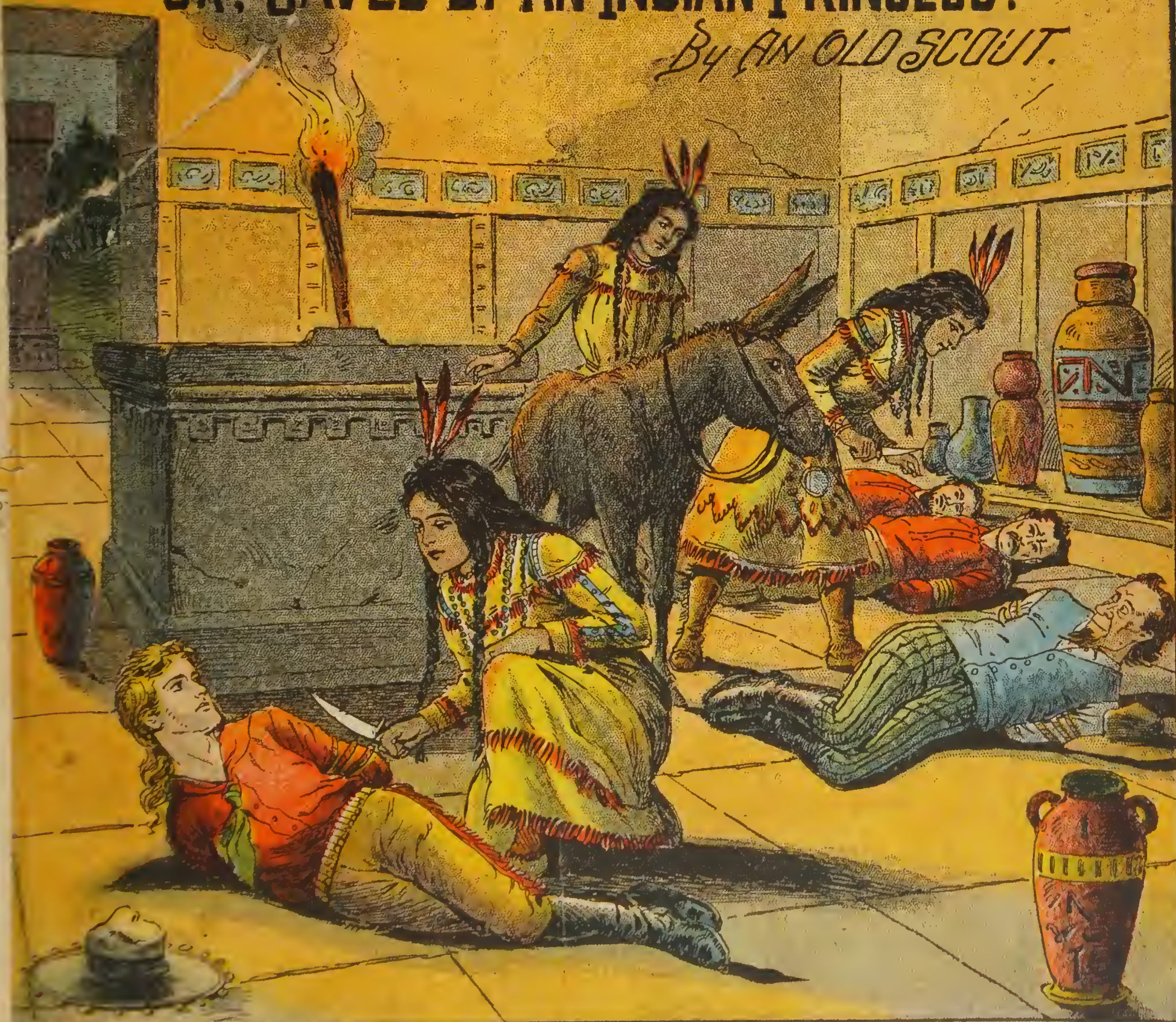
NEW YORK, DECEMBER 12, 1902.

Price 5 Cents.

YOUNG WILD WEST MISSING!

OR, SAVED BY AN INDIAN PRINCESS.

By AN OLD SCOUT.



Tripping Fawn produced a knife from the folds of her loose-fitting robe and cut the thongs that bound them. "Thank you, Tripping Fawn!" exclaimed Young Wild West. "May your eyes always shine as bright as the stars, and may you never know a care or pain."

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CHAPTER I.

NEW ARRIVALS AT WESTON.

The officers of the Wild West Mining and Improvement Company were gathered in the snug little office in the rapidly growing town of Weston on a rainy afternoon a few days after the Indian chief's legacy had been found near the water-fall at the foot of the three mountain peaks.

Things had been rather slow in town since that time, and Young Wild West, our hero, and his friends were getting uneasy.

This was the regular quarterly meeting of the officers of the company, and Dove-Eye Dave, the president, had the floor.

Secretary Jim Dart had just finished reading the minutes of the last meeting, and the president said:

"All in favor of adoptin' ther minutes as read will say aye!"

"Aye!" was the unanimous retort from the lips of Young Wild West, the treasurer and chairman of the board of trustees, and Cheyenne Charlie and Jack Robedee, the other two members of the board.

"I declare 'em approved as read. Now, then, reports of committees. Are there any to report?"

"None here," observed Wild, rising to his feet. "I don't think it is necessary to go through all this form. We all know that there was no committee appointed at our last meeting. We have simply gone right ahead and done all the business we could and had a dance, which was very

successful, so all that is needed now is to see if the books balance, and find out how much there is in the treasury. That book of parliamentary rules the president has been investing in won't come in for much use in this concern, I'm thinking."

"But it is ther only way to do business," retorted the president, who was a pioneer to that region before Wild was born, and a successful miner.

"I move you that we hear the report of the secretary," spoke up Cheyenne Charlie.

"Second ther motion!" called out Jack Robedee.

"Question!" added Wild.

The old man wanted to proceed according to the rules he had been studying, but it was no use, so he put the question, and it was carried without any further remarks.

Jim Dart read the account of the monies received by him and the receipts from the treasurer, and the report was adopted as read.

Then Jim made a motion that the treasurer should report, which was promptly carried.

Wild showed a clear statement of what there was in the treasury, and when the report had been received, he made a motion to adjourn.

This was carried, in spite of Dove-Eye Dave's efforts to prolong the meeting and go through the rules that were laid down in the book.

"I'm satisfied that we won't git wery far ahead," observed the old man. "Why, I sent all ther way to Chicago after that book, jest because I wanted to run these here meetin's of ourn in ther regular way."

"Parliamentary rules are all right where there are a lot of men who are suspicious and trying to get the best of each other," retorted Wild. "But it strikes me that we are not that kind of people."

"I never thought of that," and Dove-Eye Dave tossed the book high upon a shelf. "That settles ther parliamentary rules. We are citizens of ther Wild West, an' such things don't go here, I guess."

"You've guessed jest right, old man," said Jack Robedee, with a nod of approval.

"It seems to me that this rain is going to keep up all the week," spoke up young Wild West, changing the subject.

"It certainly is comin' right down ag'in," responded Cheyenne Charlie, as he went to the window and took a look at the threatening sky and falling torrents.

He was just about to walk back and sit down again when his eye suddenly caught sight of a band of horsemen riding down the mountain road.

The galloping hoofs sent the mud flying in all directions.

"Some more new arrivals," he said. "I wonder where they come from, Wild?"

The young Prince of the Saddle and dead-shot of the West, as he was called, quickly took a look at the approaching horseman.

"Cowboys fresh from the plains," he said with a nod. "They have come out here to try their luck at mining, I suppose, and, like the majority of people, they, no, doubt, are looking to better their financial conditions."

The office of the company was within a hundred yards of the road, and when the horsemen passed, our friends counted eighteen of them.

The majority of them wore their hair long in the regular style of plainsmen, and they were a pretty reckless lot, if they could be judged by appearances.

They will probably try and make things lively in town to-night," observed Jim Dart, as he closed his books and gave a yawn.

"You are right there," nodded Dove-Eye Dave. "They'll jest about try to run ther town."

"Well, let them enjoy themselves, so long as they don't do any damage."

Our friends watched the cowboys, and saw that they rode up to the first saloon and dismounted.

"Now, ther whisky will begin to fly," laughed Jack Robedee. "There ain't any fellers to be found that kin beat cowboys spendin' money."

"When they've got it to spend," added Charlie.

Just then Walter Jenkins, their foreman came in the office. He had quit work for the day, and as was invariably his custom, he came in to make entries from his book to the office book as to the hours the men had put in.

"I just saw several new arrivals come in town," Jenkins observed.

"Yes, we noticed them go by," replied Wild.

"They seemed to be a reckless lot."

"Don't gettin' scared of 'em a'ready, are you?" asked Dove-Eye Dave.

"No, I am not getting scared of any one," was the quick reply. "Just because I never look for fight does not say that I am afraid to fight when the time comes."

"That's right, Walter. We know you well enough to be satisfied that you are no coward. You have married and settled down, and that is why you don't take kindly to hunting outlaws and Indians."

"I didn't mean no harm by what I said," the old man hastened to say apologetically.

"Oh, there is no harm done," and Jenkins smiled good humoredly. "You fellows can say what you like about me; I shan't mind it."

The afternoon was now rapidly drawing to a close.

The heavy sky made darkness come all the quicker, and as soon as they could no longer see very well our friends closed the office and started for their respective homes.

The house where Wild, Jim and Jack lived was within a few feet of the office, as was that of Jenkins, but Cheyenne Charlie and Dove-Eye Dave had a good two minutes' walk to reach theirs.

All hands now stepped out into the rain, and as they did so they saw that there was still another arrival in Weston on that rainy day.

Coming down the hill at a pace that was not much swifter than a snail's, was a queer-looking covered wagon drawn by a pair of gaunt mules.

The driver, who sat well back under the cover of the wagon-top, was apparently taking things easy.

He was smoking a clay pipe, which our friends could see quite plainly as he got nearer, and he did not seem to mind the falling rain any more than he would have if the sun was shining brightly.

"Hello!" he called out when he observed the group standing there watching him. "Is this here place Weston?"

"Yes," replied some one.

"Good enough, then! Pretty work! I'm glad I'm here! I'm Yankee Pete, ther boss peddler of ther kentry! Want to see what I've got ter sell, strangers?"

"Not just now," answered Wild. "A little later on we might do some business with you."

"Say! Where is there a good place for me to go in camp around here? I can't afford to put up at a hotel, an' I want to hang up somewhar where I won't be bothered by anybody—I mean I don't want to stop on ground that belongs to some critter as wouldn't want me to stop there."

"Well, there is a good place right over there by that blasted pine. You'll find water and fodder for your mules there, and I am quite sure that no one will try to drive you away from the place."

Young Wild West pointed out the place, and with a "thankee, stranger," Yankee Pete, the peddler, as he called himself, turned and drove to the blasted pine.

Contrary to the expectations of the most of the residents of Weston, the rain ceased to fall a few minutes later, and when the sun sank below the western horizon the sky was tinged with pink and red.

That meant that the storm was over.

After supper Wild and Jim took a walk over to see how the peddler was making out.

In spite of the fact that everything was wet, the man had managed to build a fire, and he was boiling a pot of coffee and broiling a chunk of salted meat.

"How are you getting on?" asked Jim. "Does the camping place suit you?"

"Bully!" was the reply. "This are a fine kentry out this way, an' I 'spect to do a good business afore I git to ther railroad to git more goods."

"What have you got to sell, anyway?" questioned Wild.

"I'm goin' to open up business as soon as I git through supper. I'll stay right here an' draw ther crowd to me."

"How are you going to do that?"

"Oh! All I have got ter do is ter play a couple of tunes on my cornet. I reckon I can make every man, woman an' child hear me play ther Star Spangled Banner when once I strike up—that is, of course, if there ain't any of 'em what's deaf."

Young Wild West smiled when he heard this.

He had sized the stranger up to his full satisfaction, and made up his mind that he was a shrewd Yankee out for business, and that he was probably pretty well able to take care of himself.

He did not wear a belt, but the butt of a big revolver stuck out of his hip pocket.

The man was certainly as green looking as he could well be.

His eyes were of the dull, fishy gray color, and the scraggy yellow whiskers on his chin and the very thin mustache he wore made him look like just what he undoubtedly was—a "Down-easter."

But such people as he was should not always be judged by their appearance.

Wild knew this, as he had met more than one Yankee in his day.

Not wishing to interfere with the man's meal, the two young fellows walked over to the heart of the town.

It was perfectly clear now, and the moon was rising from behind a distant peak.

Wild and Jim had not got very far before they were overtaken by Charlie.

"Goin' to take a look at ther cowboys?" he asked.

"Well, we didn't come particularly for that," replied Jim. "The peddler is going to start up business pretty soon, and we thought we would take a walk over here to pass the time while he was eating his supper and getting ready."

The three walked on, and presently came to the saloon where the band of cowboys had stopped.

Heretofore they had been pretty quiet, but just as our friends were passing pistol shots began cracking in the place, and the yells of two or three drunken men rang out.

"I guess they are harmless," said Wild, as Charlie paused and acted as though he would like to go in and see what the rumpus was about. "Come on! Don't interfere with their sport."

They were about to pass on when a big man wearing a

"Hello, there, Young Wild West! What in blazes are yer in a hurry for?"

"I am in no hurry," replied Wild, as he turned and took a good look at the cowboy, who was standing in the glare of the oil lamp in front of the shanty.

"Well, come on in an' have a drink with Broncho Bob then."

"Are you the gentleman?" asked Wild, as he walked leisurely to the saloon.

"That's jest who I be! Put your right hand there! I'm glad ter meet ye, Young Wild West."

The big boy made an attempt to give the hand of our hero an awful squeeze, but somehow, he made a mistake, and then it was that his fingers got it.

Wild was so used to meeting such men that he knew just how to act when he came in contact with them.

The moment the red-shirted fellow hailed him he knew there was trouble brewing.

Consequently he was ready to meet it half way.

"Howling catamounts! but you've got an awful grip, young feller!" cried the surprised cowboy.

"Excuse me," was the quick retort. "I didn't want to hurt you."

"Hurt me!" echoed Broncho Bob, looking as though it could not have been possible that the boy had made such a remark. "Why—why, you don't think you could hurt me, do you? Come on and have a drink."

"I'll take a cheroot with you."

Wild pushed his way into the place ahead of Broncho Bob, and Jim and Charlie followed.

They both realized only too well that the man was a great big bluffer, and they were certain that there would a little fun before long.

The room was packed with men when Wild stepped in and all eyes were turned upon him.

Outside of the man who ran the place and the two men who worked for him, there was no one there who had ever seen our hero before.

Some of them had not even heard of him, and the leader of the cowboys, who said he was Broncho Bob, was one of these.

Some one had remarked that Young Wild West was passing, and when a couple of the band showed that they were interested in him their leader went outside and hailed him.

"So you'll take a cheroot, hey?" remarked Broncho Bob. "I didn't ask you to smoke; I asked you to drink."

"Well, I don't care to drink anything just now. Landlord, give us all a cheroot."

As Wild said this the man behind the bar promptly put out the box.

"We don't want to smoke, I told you!" and with that the big cowboy struck the box of cigars from the counter and sent them flying around the room.

"Mr. Broncho Bob, I guess you had better pay for that lot of cheroots. Landlord, do you know how many there were in the box?"

"No, I don't, but it'll jest take ten dollars to settle ther bill for 'em," was the reply.

"Put down ten dollars, and do it quick!" exclaimed Young Wild West, catching the big bluffer by the ear, and pulling his head almost to the bar. "Don't get excited, gentlemen," he added, "for if anyone does get excited, and draws a gun he'll get a streak of hot lead through him! I am not bluffing, gentlemen; I mean what I say."

Broncho Bob made a move to reach for his gun, but found the muzzle of a shooter staring him in the face!

CHAPTER II.

BRONCHO BOB AND TOM TEXAS.

A couple of the cowboys made a move to draw their revolvers, but Jim Dart and Cheyenne Charlie had them covered so quickly that they turned pale and changed their minds.

"Ten dollars, please!" exclaimed Wild. "You must pay for the smokers you knocked on the floor, you know."

The big cowboy's hand slid into the pocket of his fancy buckskin trousers without any further ado, and out came a handful of money.

"Now, I guess we'll all smoke, won't we?" Wild said quietly, as he let go of the man's ear. "Landlord, take your ten dollars out of his pile, and then give us all a smoke on me."

"Well, I'm be jiggered if you don't beat anything I ever seen!" exclaimed he with the red shirt, and then he forced a laugh.

"I have a way of always minding my own business, and at the same time, keep things on a straight line," was the reply, as Wild picked out a cheroot from the fresh box and lighted it. "You hailed me and got me to come in here for the purpose of having some fun with me, I suppose. I'll bet you were going to make me drink whisky, whether I wanted to or not. Am I right?"

"I've got nothing to say, Young Wild West. You are a regular searcher, an' that's all there is about it. Let's give him three cheers, boys!"

The cowboys responded to a man, many of them cheering from the heart, too, for there were those among them who had been completely won by the coolness of Wild and the quick and easy way he had about him.

Our three friends left the saloon after the cheering had subsided, no one offering to raise any objections to their going.

"That was settled about three times easier than I thought it would be," observed Charlie, as they turned their steps to Brown's Gazoo.

"Yes, but that fellow is not satisfied yet," replied Wild. "He will be trying to catch me napping, so if he don't, he is the biggest bluffer I've seen in some time."

"Well, if Mr. Broncho Bob stays around Weston long he will be apt to learn a thing or two," observed Jim. "He'll find that this ain't no little one-horse prairie town."

The three entered the Gazoo and found it pretty well filled with gamblers and men who were looking on.

It was the first time either of them had been there since Charlie had played poker and outwitted a professional.

"Hello, Mr. West!" called out Brown, who always seemed glad to see the boy who had the reputation of being the boss town boomer of the Hills. "Where have you been keeping yourself the past few days?"

"Oh! I have been rather busy," was the reply. "We went away on a little journey, you know."

"Yes, I heard something about that. You was in great luck, it seems."

"That is a way I have—being lucky, you know."

"Well, I believe it is. Won't you have a good cigar?"

"Thank you! I am smoking now."

Just then the shrieking of a cornet came to their ears.

It was Yankee Pete, the peddler, and he was playing the Star Spangled Banner for all he was worth.

The man had not made any mistake when he said he would make every man, woman and child in Weston hear him when he started in.

In less than five minutes the good men, the bad men and the indifferent men of the town were hurrying to the spot, as well as the women and children.

And that was just what the Yankee wanted.

If he once got a crowd around him he was satisfied, for if they had any money he was bound to get a portion of it.

Wild, Jim and Charlie went along with the rest, and when they got there they found their friends taking in the show, for such it could be called just then.

The peddler had attired himself in a rig that had no doubt belonged to a circus clown once upon a time, and he was standing upon a sort of platform which had been let down from the back of his wagon.

He had finished the first tune and was well upon another when our friends pushed their way to the front, so they could see all that was going on.

The cowboys had been among the first to get there after the cornet sounded, and they were gathered in a bunch on horseback, right close to the Yankee.

The music could hardly be called sweet, but it sounded good to the crowd, as a cornet player was seldom seen in that section.

When the peddler had finished the second piece, he opened up business.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he began, "I am Yankee Pete, from the State of Vermont, an' I make an honest livin' by sellin' dry-goods an' notions. I have got anything from a spool of cotton to a rubber overcoat. Now, then, I'm goin' to make an offer to yer! Here's a paper of pins, a paper of needles, two spools of cotton, a ball of darning cotton and a guttapercha comb, all for the small sum of one dollar! Who wants the first lot?"

That was enough to get the crowd going.

In half an hour the Yankee had sold all he had of that combination, so he played a couple of tunes on the cornet and struck in selling fancy colored flannel shirts at five dollars apiece.

These went like hot cakes, and the supply was soon exhausted.

Then there was some more music, and when this was about half through the cowboys concluded to have some fun with the peddler.

They had patronized him pretty well by buying the shirts, so thought they were entitled to do about as they pleased.

Broncho Bob had evidently forgot all about how he had been taken down by Young Wild West, for he was now as reckless as a man could be.

He had been saying and doing objectionable things ever since he had bought one of the shirts, and now he began shooting bullets through the roof of the wagon with a revolver in either hand.

Some of the bullets went dangerously close to the head of the Yankee, who did some dodging in a comical way, and appeared to be very much frightened until both chambers of the shooters had been emptied.

Then Yankee Pete fixed his eyes on Broncho Bob and said:

"Now, if you are through, I'll commence! Hold up your hands, you ornery galoot from Galootville!"

In the twinkling of an eye an old-fashioned, long-barrelled pistol was leveled at the cowboy's head, and the gleam in the pair of fishy eyes that had first seen the light in the State of Vermont showed that their owner meant business, and nothing but business.

Up went the hands of Broncho Bob, and then a loud guffaw went up from the miners.

Yankee Pete made the fellow keep his hands up for about a minute, and then said:

"You kin put 'em down now, if you want ter. But let me tell yer one thing, if you go to cuttin' up any more didoes around here I'll jest yank you offen that horse an' give you a good spankin'!"

This made everybody laugh, even to the cowboys, and the big bluffer got as mad as a wet hen.

But he thought it best not to let the crowd know he was mad, so he made believe that he enjoyed the situation as well as any of the rest.

The man from "down east" gave them some more selections with his cornet and sold lots more goods.

When he had wound up for the evening, nearly his entire load had been disposed of.

The best "ad." he had was Broncho Bob.

The way he had handled the cowboy completely won the hearts of the people in the crowd, and many of them just bought for the sake of helping him along.

They did not stop to think that the peddler was a shrewd Yankee, and that he was making more than a hundred per cent on everything he sold.

The cowboys left in a real peaceful manner when the "show" was over, and repaired to the place they had first arrived at on their arrival in town.

The landlord told them that he could not give them all beds, but as they insisted on staying, said he would fix up places for them to sleep on the floor.

This was entirely satisfactory, for many of them scarcely knew what it was to sleep in bed.

When the eighteen of them were together in the big room back of the barroom, Broncho Bob said:

"Boys, we rode over a hundred miles to git into this town. We come here to strike it rich, so's we won't have to roundup ther cattle any more. We've got here an' found that there is a boy what rules ther town. A boy, I said! He is only a boy in looks, you know."

"But a rip-snorter of a man in everything else," spoke up one of the men.

"Mebbe he is, an' mebbe he ain't," retorted the big leader of the crowd. "He's got a whole lot of nervy men in these diggin's, who back him in everything he does. Don't you s'pose I could walk Young Wild West around any way I took a notion to if I wanted ter do it? But, pshaw! if I didn't get half a dozen bullets through my gizzard afore you could say Jack Robinson! He's got too many to back him, I tell yer. I kin see through it all. He's been lucky enough to strike it rich in ther hills, an' he's helped a whole lot of these people out, an' put 'em on the right track to dig out ther nuggets. That's why he's allowed to have so much to say in this town."

There was something that sounded like logic in this, and the cowboys began to think that Broncho, as they called him for short, was about right.

The more they thought over it the more they became convinced that the boy was nothing more than an upstart, who was being humored by the people of the town just because he was rich, good looking and had a saucy way about him.

"Now, boys," resumed Broncho Bob, "as I said before, we've come over a hundred miles to this place what they call Weston, an' we expect to stay here awhile to dig out yaller nuggets an' have fun. If this here Young Wild West stays around here we won't have no show to do either one of 'em, 'cause I'm sure he is dead sore on us. Now, ther quicker he is got rid of ther better it will be for us, an' everybody else in town, I guess, when they come to think of it."

"That's right!" exclaimed Tom Texas, who was the right bower of Broncho. "Captain Bob, I make a motion that you ap'oint a committee to look after ther boy."

"Why don't you two fellers act on ther committee?" asked a small, wiry looking chap, who had said but little during the whole evening.

This man bore the name of Lunkhead Luke, and he seemed rather prond of the title, since he really thought that he was anything but that which the name implied.

"I thought it was about time we heard from Lunkhead," observed Broncho with a grin. "Well, jest to please him, me an' Tom will go on that committee. But, understand you all, mun's ther word! There mustn't a soul outside of us git hold of what we've been talkin' about."

"S'posin' some one has been listenin' to us through ther partition?" Lunkhead suggested.

"They couldn't have heard what we said if they had, an', besides, this ain't that kind of a hotel. They don't have eavesdroppers here like inquisitive hotel servants in the big cities."

The men were all reclining on the floor in a circle, their heads being close together, and as the conversation had been carried on in low tones it was hardly probable that they had been heard.

This much being settled, the conversation began to flag, and one by one they dropped off into slumber.

When they got up in the morning, the men went out in front of the saloon and began to wrestle and buffet each other about, to work off the stiffness in their joints caused by lying on boards.

Broncho Bob seemed to be right in his element when indulging in this kind of sport. He threw his companions right and left with the greatest of ease, making himself a veritable giant to some of the lookers-on.

Yet the starch had been taken out of him twice since he had been in Weston, once by Young Wild West and once by the peddler from 'Way Down East.

After they got through with their frolic, the men attended to their horses and then went in to breakfast.

They all had plenty of money, it seemed, and acting on the advice of Lunkhead Luke, they started out to stake up claims after breakfast.

There was plenty of land there, so they had little difficulty in doing this.

Then they bought the necessary mining utensils at the supply store and started in—not to work, but to get drunk!

That was a way they had, and nothing could stop them till they had enough.

It was about noon when Broncho Bob and Tom Texas, the committee who were to attend to Young Wild West's case, started toward the mouth of the canyon where the Yankee peddler had pitched his camp.

They knew they would have to pass through the property belonging to the Wild West Mining & Improvement Co., if they went up there, and that would give them a line on what their intended victim was doing and where he would be apt to be found when the proper time came.

The two men were on foot, and as they neared the company's office they saw Young Wild West come out and walk over toward the Yankee's wagon alone.

"That's putty good," remarked Broncho to his companion. "I've got a grudge ag'in that peddler, too, an' it sorter runs inter my head that ther time is now close to hand when I am goin' to git square on the pair of 'em."

"It do look that way," was the reply, though Tom Texas appeared to be rather uneasy.

He was but a coward, the same as his companion, and unless he got the drop on his man he invariably quit, no matter what sort of a bluff he was putting on.

"I wonder what ther peddler is sayin' to ther boy?" the big cowboy remarked a minute later, when he saw the down-caster talking to Wild in a rather excited manner.

"I don't know. It looks as though somethin' has gone wrong with ther fool."

"I hope ther has somethin' gone wrong with him. If it hadn't been that I had sense enough to know that I would have got riddled if I'd done it last night, I'd have shot out both his eyes with my revolver. I never seed s'ch eyes as

that man's got! They look like ther scales of a dead fish when he's playin' that bugle of his, but when he gits mad they shine like ther sparks goin' up from a prairie fire. I'll bet he kin shoot straight with that old pistol of his, too."

"I reckon he could. Them long barrel fellers ginerally do shoot putty straight. There! Ther boy an' ther peddler are walkin' off up ther canyon as though they might be lookin' for somethin'. I guess ther old feller must have lost one of his mules, 'cause I only see one of 'em eatin' grass over there."

"That's jist what has happened, I'll bet!" exclaimed Broncho Bob. "Now, we'll go an' help 'em look for ther mule. They might need us, you know."

The rascally cowboy chuckled as though he had got off a good joke, and when he chuckled his companion laughed outright.

It was very funny!

"It are a good thing it are noon, an' everybody is busy eatin' their grub," Tom Texas ventured after a pause. "It couldn't be a better chance than what we've got."

"If we do have luck enough to plug 'em with lead we've got to be mighty careful an' bury 'em so's they won't be found, 'cause if they're found we'll git ther blame, an' you know what'll happen then."

Broncho placed his fingers on his neck significantly, and his companion shrugged his shoulders.

CHAPTER III.

MISSING.

The reason that Young Wild West started for the peddler's camp when he come out of the office at noon was because the Yankee happened to catch his eye, and beckoned for him to come over.

"What's the matter?" asked Wild when he got there.

"I've lost one of my long eared critters," was the reply.

"Lost one of the mules, eh?"

"Yes, an' ther funniest part of it is that I can't find him, though I tracked him straight up here for about a quarter of a mile along ther bank of ther stream that runs through here."

"How far up, did you say?" questioned the boy.

"About a quarter of a mile, but I don't s'pose you kin hardly call it up; it's down, 'cause ther water runs that way, an' it runs like a mill-race, too. I kin tell yer!"

"That accounts for the disappearance of the mule, then. He has walked out into the stream, got caught into the current and been carried away."

"You don't mean that?"

"Yes, I do. I have heard about that stream of water before. It leaves the surface up here a ways, or down here, as you say, and enters a sort of natural tunnel and runs on underground to no one knows where. A man or horse or anything else would not stand a ghost of a chance if he got

into the power of the current near the place where it disappears underground. It acts about the same way as the current a few yards from the brink of a waterfall does."

"Sho!" exclaimed the Yankee. "You don't mean it!"

"Well, I am in no particular hurry for my dinner, so I'll prove to you what I say is strictly correct, Mr.——"

"Pete—call me Pete. I like it better."

"All right, then, Pete. Come on! We will walk down to the place where you tracked your mule to, and see if I am not right."

The Yankee was curious to see the place Wild had described.

He was so curious, in fact, that he forgot all about the loss of his mule.

So the two walked across the open place at the mouth of the canyon, till they came to the bank of a very innocent looking mountain stream.

In the sand and clay on the bank they could see the tracks made by the mule, and also those made by Pete a short time before when he went to look for him.

"This will all be staked out through here before many months," observed Wild, as they walked along. "There is plenty of good paying dirt here, and I know it."

"I don't hanker much after diggin' out gold," said Pete, shaking his head. "I'd rather accumulate ther stuff after some one else digs it out."

Young Wild West could not help smiling at this.

He knew pretty well what the nature of the man was.

Though honest enough, the Yankee would never let a chance slip whereby he could add to his wealth and not do much work for it.

The two walked on down the bank of the stream, which got deeper and ran with more force the further they went, and presently they reached the place where the mule had gone into the water.

Wild nodded in a satisfied manner, and pointing to a maze of tangled vines which hung down from a group of dull gray rocks, said:

"There is where the stream disappears under ground. Now, if the mule went into the water right here, and it is a sure thing that he did, he is now down in the bowels of the earth somewhere."

"How in blazes am I goin' to git him out, if that is ther case?"

Our hero laughed.

"I don't think you would have any use for him if you did get him," he replied. "Why, don't you think he is dead—drowned by that rushing water?"

"He might not be," and the peddler shook his head as though he thought there was a reasonable doubt.

Then he led the way close to the overhanging vines in order to get a glimpse at the last point where his lost mule had been daylighted.

Wild followed him, and both leaned forward to peer into the opening that the rushing, roaring waters of the stream was then sight in.

Just then Wild heard a noise right behind him, and turning quickly, was just in time to see a man rushing upon

him with outstretched arms as though to throw him into the stream.

He had no time to draw his revolver, for the man was too close.

He simply made a grab to hold himself from being shoved, and as he did so he became aware of the fact that the Yankee had been attacked in the same manner.

It all happened in the tenth part of a second, but in that brief instant our friends recognized their assailants.

It was Tom Texas who had seized Wild, and Broncho Bob who had pounced upon the peddler.

Wild and Pete had been so engrossed in talking about the stream and making an examination of it as they walked along, that they had failed to note the fact that they were being followed.

It was seldom that Young Wild West got caught un-awares, but this was one of the times.

With less than a foot separating them from the fierce torrent that would suck them into the bowels of the earth, Wild and the Yankee struggled for their lives.

Their assailants had not drawn a weapon, and they could not; all they could do was to hold on with a death grip and try to force the villains back from the edge of the stream.

They had been taken by surprise and their assailants were far heavier than they, so it could only be the question of a few seconds at the least before they would lose the struggle.

"Consarn yer!" cried the Yankee in a voice that was half triumph, half despair; "if I go into ther water you'll go, too!"

The dirt caved from beneath his feet at that very instant. Broncho Bob let go and tried to save himself by clutching the arm of Tom Texas, who was right close to him.

That wound up the battle for supremacy on the bank, for all four tumbled into the rushing current, the despairing cries on their lips being cut short as they were sucked from view.

And the stream flowed on in the even tenor of its way, just as though nothing had happened to disturb its regular flow.

"I wonder what keeps Wild so late for his dinner?" observed Jim Dart, as he stood in front of the house, looking over at the peddler's camp. "I saw the Yankee beckon to him to come over there, but I can't imagine where they have gone."

"They went over across ther canyon," spoke up Jack Robedec. "I seen 'em go. I seen two of them cowboys go along in ther same direction jist after they went, too. Wild is down there tellin' about ther richness of ther country here, I s'pose."

"Well, I guess we had better eat dinner, then. I can't see how he would object to us doing it; he went away without saying anything."

That settled it, so they sat down to the meal the Chinese cook had prepared for them and did full justice to it.

When they got through they went over and stood in front of the office.

Cheyenne Charlie soon came up, smoking his pipe, and evidently in a very happy frame of mind.

"Where's Wild?" he asked. "I have got a little joke on him. Arietta has been telling Anna about the wedding trip she expects to take some day. I just want to rub it into him a little bit."

"I don't know where he is," replied Jim. "The peddler called him over there when we came out to go to dinner and I have not seen him since. Jack says they went over across the canyon."

"Well, let's take a walk over there an' hunt 'em up."

"All right."

The three walked slowly over to the camp of Yankee Pete and found it completely deserted, save for one of the mules which was browsing the grass in a contented manner.

"I wonder where ther other mule is?" Jack remarked. "Them two mules of ther Yank's puts me in mind of when I was a boy an' used to fly kites. Some feller who was putty smart got out a whole lot of kites with pictures on 'em, an' they was sold for two cents apiece in ther town in New York State that I lived in. They could be bought at ther post office in our town, so one blowy day in March I thought I'd do away with ther home-made kind and invest two cents in a boughten kite. I looked over ther 'sortment ther post-master showed me, an' putty soon I picked out one with a team of mules on it."

"You made a good selection," remarked Jim.

"Yes, that's what I thought. Well, underneath ther picture was ther words, 'When shall we three meet again?' I handed ther kite to ther postmaster an' asked him what ther picture an' ther words meant. It happened to be a new lot, an' he hadn't seen any like that one before, so after studyin' for about two minutes he says, 'It means that I am a jackass, I guess. Ther feller what got up that picture thought he was almighty smart.'"

Jim and Charlie laughed heartily over this. They had heard about the same old joke, but it sounded good when Jack told it, and they could not help laughing.

"We will take a walk in the direction Wild and the Yankee went," suggested Charlie, so they started.

"Two of ther cowboys went this way, too," said Jack.

"They did, hey?" asked the scout. "Which two of 'em was they?"

"Ther leader of 'em an' another, that's all I know."

"I don't think much of those fellers," said Charlie, half to himself. "I wouldn't trust any one of them very far, especially that feller Broncho Bob."

"Oh, I rather think they are harmless," remarked Jim. "Wild handled them very easily, and so did the peddler last night."

"About half of 'em has got Greaser blood in 'em, if I know anything about it."

"I was thinking that way myself," chimed in Robedee.

"Well, that might signify that they are treacherous, then," admitted Jim, who, to tell the truth, was beginning to feel rather uneasy over Wild's absence.

The further he walked along the more he felt this way, though just why he could not tell.

When they got to the bank of the stream they could easily see fresh footprints in the sand, so they walked on down till they came to the place where the mule took to the water.

Beyond this they could see no tracks, as the ground was of a rocky formation from there on to the cliff where the stream disappeared.

Strange, as it may seem, it never occurred to either of them just then that Wild and the Yankee might have fallen into the stream.

So they walked back to a place where it was narrow enough for them to leap over, and then went searching about on the other side.

The canyon broadened out considerably here, and as there were innumerable rocks, bushes, trees, and high grass there, it would be a difficult matter for them to sight any one.

After they had walked around for about fifteen minutes Jim suggested that they go back.

"Ther chances are that they are there now," said Jack. "There wasn't much use of our lookin', anyhow. As if Wild couldn't take care of himself!"

"Oh! I simply came for ther walk to settle my dinner more than anything else," retorted Charlie. "I never once thought that anything had happened to Wild."

"Well, now, since you are both talking that way, I must tell you that I can't help thinking but that something has happened to him," spoke up Jim, showing a very serious expression on his face as he said the words.

"What makes you think that way, Jim?" asked Cheyenne.

"That's the sticker! I can't tell what makes me think that way, but I do, just the same."

"Pshaw! I'll bet a plug of tobacker ag'in a six-ounce nugget that we'll find him at the house when we git back!" exclaimed Jack.

"I hope you are right," was all Jim Dart said, and then they walked briskly back to the peddler's camp.

When they got there they found it deserted, just the same as they had seen it a few minutes before.

The mule was still nibbling at the grass, and the sticks the Yankee had piled up ready to light, so he could cook his dinner, remained unlighted.

The three walked over to the office.

Walter Jenkins had just got there.

"Seen anything of Wild?" was the question he asked them as they came in.

The three looked at each other.

"We can't find him anywhere," replied Jim. "The last seen of him he was walking down the canyon with the Yankee peddler just after he left the office this mornin'."

When night finally came and the boy had not shown up, Jim took it upon himself to make it public throughout Weston that Young Wild West was missing!

CHAPTER IV.

THE VALLEY.

When Young Wild West struck the water of the rushing stream he was almost ready to give himself up as lost.

But while there is life there is hope, and there was no one on this great and glorious earth who believed in the word "hope" any more than Wild did.

He had a grip upon his assailant with both hands when the water closed over them, and he let go with the right only, determined to cling to him as long as his life should last.

Owing to the force of the current they did not go down more than six feet, and instinctively the boy began trying to reach the surface.

It was the same with his antagonist. He had let go with both hands and was using his utmost power to rise to the surface.

It was nearly a minute from the time they went under that Wild's head came above the water.

He found himself in Stygian darkness, and the roaring noise that came to his ears was almost deafening.

But he could breathe!

That was sufficient to make his hopes arise a hundred per cent., and, relinquishing his grip upon the cowboy, he struck out for himself in his great battle for life or death.

But there was only one way to be in that black, roaring torrent.

The current must have been running easily thirty miles an hour, and the thought of stemming that was really ridiculous.

There was only one thing to do and that was to wait and trust to luck.

Whirr—whirr—whirr! The roaring noise was awful.

It sounded as though a hundred tornadoes had struck that black place at one time.

It was no easy matter for him to keep his head above water, either, and Wild was kept battling each second to avoid being drowned by the terrible suction that ever and anon sought to drag him under.

Ten, fifteen, twenty seconds passed.

There was no change in the situation.

But one thing: Wild was not losing courage.

On the other hand, he was growing more hopeful.

Occasionally something bumped against him, which he knew must either be the body of the man who had fallen in the stream with him, or else that of Yankee Pete or Broncho Bob.

The boy knew that the whole four were in the clutch of the rushing stream.

The last sight his eyes had rested upon was the forms of Pete and the cowboy falling into the water almost on top of him, and the villain who had attacked him.

A minute passed by and it seemed as though it was almost an hour.

Still that awful blackness and the terrible roar.

Finally five minutes had passed.

Then Young Wild West noticed that the speed of the current was slowing somewhat.

The roaring noise was gradually lessening, too.

That meant that the terrible journey through the subterranean stream was coming to a finish, or that the stream was getting wider.

Slower and slower the current ran, and less and less the noise caused by the rushing water became.

But the awful darkness did not lessen a particle.

When perhaps ten minutes had elapsed Wild found it necessary for him to move his hands and feet in order to keep himself afloat and let go the man he was holding.

Then it remained about the same for perhaps five minutes more.

A faint ray of light then suddenly pervaded the place, and a thrill of joy shot through the boy's frame.

Gradually it grew lighter, and presently he could dimly see the outlet of the passage far ahead.

It was straight ahead, too, or else it would not have been visible to him.

Keeping his eyes upon the light, he swam just enough to keep up with the current.

Nearer and nearer the opening came, and at length Wild was whisked through it and out upon the bosom of a lake of probably an acre in extent.

Without any hesitation he struck out for the shore on the right.

As he did this he noticed that some one was already leading him in that direction.

It was Yankee Pete! He could tell that by the shape of his head.

"Hello, Pete!" he called out as loud as his exhausted condition would permit him.

"Come on!" was the rather feeble reply. "Get ashore, and then talk."

Once out of the force of the current, it did not take them long to reach the shore.

Wild was right behind the down-caster when he crawled out and sank upon the glittering sand that was kissed by the waters of the little lake.

He scrambled out and laid down to recover his breath.

But as he did this his eyes happened to glance across the lake.

Then he gave a start, and almost forgot his exhausted condition.

Broncho Bob and Tom Texas, the two villainous cowboys, were just wading out of the water.

The bottom was not so sloping at that side, and they had a much easier time of getting out.

But the two scoundrels were nearly exhausted, and they fell on the bank as though dead.

In a few minutes Wild got upon his feet.

He shook the water from him after the manner of a Newfoundland dog, and then felt of himself, as though he wanted to know if he was all there.

Of all his experiences this had been the strangest, and one of the most thrilling.

Both his revolvers had been lost, but his hunting knife was still in his belt.

"That's all right," he thought. "What good would a shooter be now—it would not go off, as the cartridges are dampened with water. Well, Pete, how do you feel?" he asked, turning to his companion.

"Like a drowned rat," was the reply. "Don't I look like one?"

Wild smiled in spite of the situation he was in.

"Well, to tell the truth, you do somewhat resemble one," he said. "But, laying all jokes aside, do you know that we have had a miraculous escape from death?"

"Gosh darned if we hain't! I thought I was a goner. But I hung to that cuss like grim death to a dyin' nigger! I made up my mind if I had to go he had to, too. There be ther two cusses that pushed us in! See 'em over there? I'm goin' to try a shot at 'em."

The Yankee had not lost his long barreled pistol, and pulling it out from the long leather holster, he cocked it and took aim at Broncho Bob on the other side of the lake, a distance of nearly a hundred feet.

Click!

That was all the noise that came from the pistol when its owner pressed the trigger.

Wild could not help smiling.

"I lost my guns," he said, "and you might just as well have lost yours, for all the good it is to you now."

"That's so," and Pete looked ruefully at the old time weapon.

The two men on the opposite side of the lake had seen the move, and they now got up and hurried back a few yards to the face of a perpendicular cliff which ran high up in the air.

"Don't be afraid," called out Young Wild West. "The water has spoiled all the powder that all of us had. My cartridges are no good and yours are the same. But, just the same, we will attend your case. You tried hard to throw us into the stream, and you succeeded, but went in with us. You wanted to kill us—kill us in a very cowardly way, and you ought to know what you will get for such work."

"Oh! I guess we ain't afraid of you," was the retort. "We are on an equal footing now. There is two ag'in two, an' our show is as good as yourn."

It was Tom Texas who said this.

"Come on over here an' we'll settle ther dispute at once," said the Yankee. "If I couldn't lick either one of you fellers I'd chew grass ther rest of my life. You are both rank cowards, an' couldn't fight fast enough to keep you warm."

"Show us a way to get over there an' we'll come," spoke up Broncho Bob.

This remark caused our friends to take a good look at their surroundings.

A little over a hundred yards down the valley the lake dwindled into a narrow stream which lost itself underground again.

The valley itself was a veritable prison, for on every hand naught but almost perpendicular cliffs reared themselves.

The side they were on was covered with luxuriant vegetation, such as is seldom seen in that part of the country, and when Wild and Pete looked at it they were really astonished.

The valley was so far down below the ordinary level that it was quite likely that frost never touched there.

That made the vegetation grow in a semi-tropical state,

The whole valley might have measured twenty acres, but not more than that.

In the distance Wild noticed a herd of deer browsing upon the rich grass.

The animals heard the talking, and threw up their heads in alarm.

As far as he could see, there was no way to leave the valley, unless they took the chances of proceeding on with the underground stream.

But this would be naught but folly, since they would be but proceeding farther toward the center of the earth.

"Well, what are we goin' to do?" asked the Yankee, who did not seem to be as much interested in their surroundings as his companion.

"We must find a way to get out of here," was the reply.

"Hain't we better dispose of them fellers on ther other side first?"

"I don't know. Suppose we let them be till they make a move to bother us?"

"Just as you say, but I reckon that ther quicker they are out of ther way ther better it will be for us."

"I have not the least doubt of that, but I guess we had better wait. They might prove of some use to us; you can't tell."

"Mighty little use they'll be to anybody, I'm thinkin'. Say! What will your people think when they find that you don't show up?"

"They won't know what to make of it, especially if we don't get back to-night."

"Git back to-night! Why, don't you think we will git back by that time?"

"It doesn't look so, I must confess."

"Why, we can't be over a mile from ther place where we fell in ther river, an' it hain't ought to take us very long to go that distance after we once git out."

"The thing is to get out, and after we do get out you will find it the longest mile you ever travelled before we get back to your camp in the mouth of the canyon."

"How far do you think it is, then?"

"Eight or ten miles, I should say."

"What!" gasped the Yankee. "Do you mean to say that we come that far under ther ground?"

"I am certainly of that opinion," replied Wild. "You must remember that we were coming at about the rate of thirty or forty miles an hour, and see how long it was before we got here."

"That's so. I never thought of that."

"Well, Pete, do you feel like taking a walk around to see what chance we have got to get out of the valley?"

"Yes. I'm jist in ther humor to git out. Gosh darn it! I wish I'd had my dinner before we came. I'm all-fired hungry."

For the third time since their arrival in the strange valley, Young Wild West was forced to laugh.

There is a whole lot of innocent humor in the down-caster that was bound to make one laugh almost under any conditions.

"I'll admit that I'm rather hungry, too, but let us see if we can get out here; that's the main thing now."

Ignoring the two villains on the opposite side of the lake entirely, they started for the rich growth of shrubbery.

A few steps brought them to the verge of it, and just as they were going in the voice of Broncho Bob called out:

"Good-by! Jest find ther way out for us an' we'll feller on a little later."

The cowboy tried to make his words sound sarcastic, but he made a failure of it. There was a chord of uneasiness in it, that gave him away.

"You can follow us any time you see fit," retorted Wild; "but look out for yourselves when you get to us!"

Pete forced his way into the bushes a few yards and suddenly came upon a beaten path.

"What in blazes does this mean, Wild?" he gasped when the boy paused at his side and looked in astonishment at the path.

"It means," was the reply, "that human beings are in the habit of going through here almost daily. We are not the only ones in the valley, Pete!"

"An' that means that there must be a way to git out of here, after all?"

"I should say it did."

"Well, let's follow this path."

"Certainly."

They turned up the path in the direction they came from when they came whirling into the little lake on the breast of the current.

"I've got fishin' lines in my wagon; I wished I had one of 'em here," said the Yankee with a sigh of regret.

"Never mind the fishing line! Come on! We will follow the path and see where it leads to."

One thing about Yankee Pete, he never raised any objections.

He started right after the young dead-shot as though it was a matter of course that he would do as he said.

Before entering the bushes again Wild looked across to the other side.

The rascally cowboys were there yet, not having moved half a dozen feet.

That was all he wanted to know.

It struck him that they might take it in their heads to run down to the other end and jump across the stream and lay somewhere in ambush.

As they had both lost their hats and the sun had been shining upon their heads while they stood on the shore of the lake, the shade of the trees made them feel grateful and refreshed.

"What sort of a knife have you got?" asked Wild in a rather low tone.

"Only my big jack-knife," was the answer.

"Get it out and open it. We can't tell what kind of people we may meet here. Don't make any more noise than you can help, either, and don't talk too loud."

"All right. Just as you say," and the knife was produced and the blade opened in a jiffy.

They kept right along the path, which wound first to the right and then to the left.

Sometimes they were quite close to the irregular face of the cliff, and then they would be in full sight of the water.

Whenever he got the opportunity, Wild glanced across the lake and took note of the fact that the two men were seated there in the same place.

There was little or no vegetation on that side, and it was evident that Broncho Bob and his companion were waiting to learn what would be the result of our friends' exploring.

"If them fellers don't see us come back inside of half an hour they will think that we have found our way out, and then they will come over here and follow us," said Young Wild West, as they neared the end of the growth of trees and bushes.

"I guess that's what's ther matter," the Yankee nodded.

Just then there was a scampering of many feet, and turning they saw the herd of deer they had noticed browsing among the bushes running in every direction.

"If we only had a gun we might have some wenison to eat," Pete resumed as the fleet-footed animals disappeared.

"Did you notice where they went?" asked Wild excitedly.

"No."

"Well, it looked to me as though they ran straight into the face of the bluff."

"Mebbe they did. There might be a tunnel, or somethin' there."

"That's just my idea. Come on! We will soon know all about it."

They pushed their way forward to a point where the overhanging limbs were so thick that the light was almost entirely shut off, and the next moment a huge opening appeared before them.

"A cave," gasped Pete.

"No, not a cave, but a passage through the cliff," retorted Young Wild West. "This is the way out of the valley. Come on."

A faint light in the distance proved that what he said was true, so without the least hesitation the two proceeded through what was certainly a natural tunnel.

For a distance of about five hundred feet it led them, and then they once more emerged into the light of day.

Wild and the Yankee paused and looked at each other in astonishment.

They had entered a valley that was similar to the one they had just left, only that it was much larger.

But that was not all.

It was inhabited.

CHAPTER V.

THE YANKEE FINDS HIS MULE.

"Gosh darn it! We've struck a town full of Injuns!" exclaimed Yankee Pete.

"You have hit the nail right on the head," answered Wild. "Just get back here under cover till we have a good look at them. I can't exactly make out what tribe they

belong to. I never saw redskins dressed in such style before. They look pretty clean, too, which surprises me most of all."

The two drew back behind a big moss-covered rock and then took a survey of the scene before them.

As far as the eye could reach there was nothing to be seen but a richly cultivated valley.

Its area must have measured many hundred acres, and unlike the smaller one they had just passed through, there was no body of water to be seen in it.

In the central part of it was a village of wigwams.

There was also a long one-story building of stone at the head or commencement of the village, which put Wild in mind of the things he had read of the ancient Aztec nation.

Both men and women were at work in the fields, and this, too, seemed rather strange, since our hero had never known of a male Indian doing anything of that sort.

Just how large the population of the strange village was could hardly be estimated from the view our two friends had of it, but it must have run up into the hundreds.

"If I had seen anything like this in Arizona or Mexico I would not be so much surprised," remarked Wild. "But up here in these mountains! Well, I can't help thinking that I am dreaming."

"You ain't dreaming, not by a jugful!" retorted Pete. "This is a town that ain't been put down on ther map—that's all. We are ther first ones to diskiver it. Say, it was lucky that them cowboys tumbled us into the stream, wasn't it?"

"Perhaps it was, and perhaps it was not. What good will it do us to discover a place inhabited by reds, where the bucks work in the fields as well as the squaws, if we never get out of it to make known the discovery?"

"Don't you think we will ever git out of it?" and the Yankee's face took on a troubled look at once.

"Well, we have got nothing to fight with but our knives, and if these Indians take it in their heads to kill us what are we going to do about it?"

"That's so. I never thought about that."

"Ah!" cried Wild suddenly. "Here comes some of them this way. I wonder what they are up to?"

"Goin' fishin', as sure as you live!" retorted Pete. "Don't you see the poles they've got with 'em? An' them baskets is for to earry the fish home!"

The boy soon saw that his companion was about right. The Indians, eight of them, surely did have poles and rude sort of baskets, and when they drew a little nearer lines of some peculiar texture could be seen attached to the poles.

They were going to pass right close to the big rock, so our friends drew well back in its shadow, Wild thinking it best not to make themselves known to the inhabitants yet.

The red men wore breech clouts of bright colors, and a funny head dress of dyed feathers. About their necks were strings of glistening beads, and nearly every one of them had heavy bracelets of shining metal about their wrists and heavy ear-rings.

In general appearance they resembled the Pawnees more than any other tribe, so Young Wild West thought.

The boy heard them chattering in their own languages and when they were near enough he could understand the greater part of what they said, as it was a smattering of Sioux, Pawnee, Crow and Cheyenne.

"Those fellows are going over to the lake to fish, and when they get their baskets full they are coming back, and after cleaning them, salt them and hang the fish up on poles to dry out in the sun," said Wild when the last Indian had disappeared in the natural tunnel.

"How do you know that?" asked Pete, looking at his young companion in surprise.

"I just heard them talking about it."

"Kin you understand that rigormarole theys goin' through?"

"Pretty well—enough to make out what they were talking about."

"Well, that jist beats me! Young Wild West, you are a wonder!"

"I was reared in this wild country, so there is nothing surprising in the fact that I should be acquainted with the different languages spoken here."

"That's all right enough, too. But jist a little while ago you told me that you'd never seen sich Injuns as these before. You ain't s'posed to know their lingo of people that you thought never lived, are you?"

"No, but these fellows talk the Indian language, nearly the same as it is spoken now."

"I understan'. Well, do you think they will go in for killin' us if we was to show ourselves?"

"I think we had better wait awhile. They will most likely catch Broncho Bob and the other man, and if they make them prisoners, why, then, we can form a pretty good idea of what they would do with us if they got hold of us."

"That's generwine wisdom, every word of it," and the peddler shook his head to emphasize his words.

"I s'pose we might as well stay right here, then?" he observed interrogatively a moment later.

"No, I guess we had better get up among the rocks there. If it should come to a fight we would have a better chance."

"That's so. Them Injuns never had a shooter or anything like that with 'em. We could knock out their brains with stones if they tried to come up there to git us."

It being decided what they should do, they began to clamber up the rocks.

In a couple of minutes they had reached the highest point they could get to, which was about fifty feet above the level of the valley.

They sat down behind a big boulder, and then waited developments.

Fifteen minutes passed, and then they heard sounds coming from the tunnel.

The Indians were returning.

The two craned their necks to get a good look at them when they came through, and the next minute they saw just what Wild had expected they would.

Four Indians came out, leading Broncho Bob and Two

Texas, the arms of both villains being bound with thongs!

The cowboys could speak a smattering of the Indian tongue, and they were pleading and doing their best to make their captors release them.

But no attention was paid to their pleadings.

The red men seemed much excited over their capture, and were hurrying to get to the village.

"Ther jig is up with us, too, I guess," said Pete with a shake of his head.

"I haven't given up yet," was the reply of Young Wild West. "There must be some way to get out of this strange country, and if we are cautious about it we might be able to get away before the Indians see us."

"We might stand a chance of doin' that if it wasn't for them two fellers they've jist caught. They'll tell ther Injuns that we are around here somewhere, an' they'll be sure to find us."

"That's so. I never thought of that," Wild admitted.

From their high position they could see pretty well what was going on in the village, which was about a quarter of a mile distant.

When the two captives were finally led in by the eight who had gone to the lake for the purpose of fishing, there was great excitement among the inhabitants.

The fish that had been caught were not of the variety they expected to see.

When the excitement had died away a little, the two men were conducted into an arched doorway at the end of the big stone building.

"Goin' to kill 'em in there, I s'pose," grunted Pete.

Young Wild West shook his head.

"It is hard to tell," he replied. "They don't act like the Indians I have been used to seeing all my life. Instead of taking them inside of any place, they would have tied them to a tree and then enjoyed themselves by looking at the squaws and children hit them with sticks and stones. That is the way the tribes I know of generally treat their prisoners."

"Well, you have already said that this was a tribe that you didn't know of, so that makes ther difference. There is no tellin' what they are goin' to do with ther cowardly hounds, an' I don't know as I care what they do do with 'em."

"Well, if they don't kill them it is not likely they will kill us. Ah! there comes the big chief of the nation out of the stone building. My! but isn't he dressed gaudily! Looks like the King of the Cannibal Islands, or some other great ruler."

Our hero turned to his companion as he said this, and as he did so he noticed that Yankee Pete's face turned the picture of amazement.

"Great squealin' tom-cats!" the peddler cried. "If there ain't my mule I'll be everlastin' jiggered!"

"It is, sure enough," and then Young Wild West laughed at the spite of himself. "And the big chief is going to mount him, too, I live!"

It was the last mile beyond a shadow of a doubt.

The long-eared animal had come through the mter-

raucan stream as safely as the human beings who came after him, and now he was being led out, in gaily decorated trappings, for the Indian chief to mount!

"He'll get blazes knocked out of him before he rides that mule ten feet!" exclaimed the Yankee as soon as he had recovered from his astonishment. "Aha! There he goes! What did I tell yer? There ain't a man on earth but me kin ride him."

The gaudily attired chief was assisted to his feet from the ground where he had been landed by the fractions mule, and while his attendants were brushing him off the animal jumped about, kicking up his heels as though very much delighted.

"He is going to try again," said Wild, whose handsome bronzed face now wore a smile of expectancy.

"He is good stuff, no doubt, but he'll never ride that mule far. I've owned ther critter too long to make a mistake in what I say."

This remark caused Young Wild West to do some quick thinking.

"I'll tell you what we will do," he said suddenly. "We will go over there, and then you can show the reds some tricks with your mule. That may be the means of saving our lives."

CHAPTER VI.

HOW WILD AND YANKEE PETE WERE TREATED BY THE INDIANS.

Yankee Pete looked aghast when Young Wild West said they would go over to the Indian village.

"Do you mean it?" he asked.

"I certainly do," was the reply. "Get yourself together, now, and put on a bold front."

"Oh! I'll stick to yer if you are goin'. You kin depend on me every time. I'll show 'em what ther mule kin do, if they'll only give me a chance. I kin ride him, an' I'm ther only one as kin."

"Well," observed Young Wild West, rising to his feet, "I don't know but that this is the best way, after all. As you said a little while ago, the two rascals they have got over there in the village will soon tell them that we are around here somewhere, and then it will only be a question of a short time before we are run down and caught. If we walk right up to them in a friendly way, and you offer to show them the proper way to ride a cranky mule, I think it will have a good effect on them and increase our chances of getting out of this mysterious valley alive."

"I believe you're right, gosh! if I don't. Come right ahead!"

Wild did not wait a bit longer, but started to work his way down to the level valley.

The place was not only new to him, but the inhabitants, as well, and he figured that the only way to act was to go right up to the Indians fearlessly.

Our two friends had scarcely got down and walked out into the open when they were observed by the Indians.

Then there was more excitement in the village.

The inhabitants ran back and forth, and many were the hands that pointed to the two strangers who were so boldly approaching.

Of course, Wild relied upon his knowledge of the Indian tongue to help them out.

He did not propose to waste a single chance, and it was his intention to tell exactly how it was that they came to be in the strange place.

Erect and as boldly as you please, the two walked over the wide, well beaten path that led into the village.

It was a brilliant move on their part, and it did not take the boy two seconds to see it.

If there is anything an Indian admires about a white man it is bravery.

Bareheaded, and with their clothing still dripping from their terrible journey through the underground river, the two walked on.

It was not until they were about half the distance that any of the inhabitants made a move to come toward them.

Then the chief himself, who had given up all attempts to ride the mule since the two whites had been perceived, by his followers, and half a dozen more, who were no doubt high up in the tribe, if their dress went for anything, started slowly to meet them.

Young Wild West waved his hand to them in token of friendship, and Pete followed suit.

The Indians, though they noticed the move, did not respond, but increased their pace slightly.

When near enough to make himself heard plainly, Wild called out:

"Most noble chief of a noble tribe, we are strangers here against our will. Will you grant us something to eat and show us the way to the top of the mountains?"

He spoke this in a mixture of Sioux and other tongues the best he could, stopping in his tracks as he said it.

The Indians stopped also, and then the chief came forward a few steps.

"What brings the white men here?" he asked, or that was what he said, as near as the boy could make out.

Then Wild walked fearlessly up to him and told just how they came to be there in the strange valley, not omitting a single fact.

He scolded Broncho Bob and Tom Texas severely and said he was willing to meet them and punish them for causing this trespass into a country where he did not belong, and the chief nodded and seemed to be just the least bit pleased.

He could understand Wild about as well as the young scout could him.

"This is the chosen land of the few great fathers of the Sioux," he said. "It is not for the paleface to enter the valley. When one does enter he never leaves, but becomes the servant of the red man, or dies, as the chief of the nation may direct."

"We do not come because we wanted to intrude. O chief!" retorted Wild, putting forth all the eloquence he could command. "We came here because we could not help

ourselves. We would pay our respects to the chief and his people and then go our way. It may be that the chief will come the way of the white man some time, and then he shall be treated accordingly."

"Harrawanda is great in his power! He never told a lie. He says that the paleface shall go to the temple of the sun, and there it shall be decided what is to be done with them. They may live and be the red man's servant, or they may die!"

With that he made a motion, and four of the brave stepped forward and took Wild and Pete by the arms.

The Yankee was going to object to this, but a quick glance from his young friend made him desist.

"Does Chief Harrawanda ride the horse with the big ears?" asked Wild as he allowed himself to be led along without the least resistance.

"Why does the paleface ask that?" the old fellow inquired.

"Because I never saw a red man ride a horse with long ears."

"That is the first horse that has been here in a hundred moons. Harrawanda never rode a horse, but he will ride this one."

"He must not try to ride a horse with long ears; that is for the white man to do," resumed Wild, realizing that there were no horses in the valley, and that the Indians were very little acquainted with them.

"If the white man can ride, so can Harrawanda," persisted the chief.

"Let the white man show him how to ride, then."

"Yes, the white man can show."

Wild gave a nod to Pete, who promptly stepped forward, the Indians releasing him.

He walked over to where the mule was being held by a couple of young bucks who seemed awed at his approach, and took hold of the rudely made, but fancy looking bridle.

"Whoa, John!" and up went the animal's ears, and then seeing that it was his master that had hold of him, rubbed his nose on the Yankee's shoulder to show his delight at seeing him.

"Easy, now, John!" and with that he was upon the mule's back.

John seemed to be pleased to have him there, for he started to trot around like a circus horse, not once offering to throw the rider.

This seemed to amaze the Indians, though they said not a word.

The Yankee took the opportunity to ride around the village for fully five minutes, during which he took it in pretty well.

Then he returned to where the chief and Wild were standing, and dismounting, handed the reins to Harrawanda.

The gorgeously attired ruler of the tribe nodded and then made an attempt to get upon the mule's back.

But it was a miserable failure, for John made a quick move sideways and let him tumble to the ground.

The chief was just getting upon his feet when the mule's

best flew out like lightning, catching him in the stomach, and sending him a dozen feet, where he lay upon the ground doubled up like a jack-knife.

Pete quickly mounted the animal again and went around the village on a wild gallop, yelling like a lunatic.

It was great fun, even if he was a prisoner in a strange country, and he made up his mind to show just what he could do with the mule.

Wild was glad to see him act that way, but did not appear to notice his antics at all.

Instead he walked over and assisted the chief to rise.

"It is not for the red man to ride the horse with the long ears," he said.

"No, it is not," was the rather feeble reply, for the chief had not fully recovered yet.

"Harrawanda said something about taking the white men to the temple. Shall we go?" asked the young scout, speaking as coolly as though he was the real master of the situation.

"Yes, we will go. Both white men shall go," was the reply. "He who rides the long eared horse must go, too."

Pete was now heading that way, riding at full speed, and Wild motioned for him to get off when he got there.

He obeyed promptly enough, and then Chief Harrawanda led the way to the temple.

Through the circular doorway the three marched, none of the other Indians following, though Wild noticed that the mule was, and they found themselves in a vast chamber that was dimly lighted.

The place was of very ancient appearance, as oddly shaped urns and stone jars of all kinds could be seen resting upon marble slabs.

It struck Young Wild West just then that he had seen a similar earthen jar before. It was that which had contained a lot of gold coins—the legacy that had been left to him by the old Sioux chief named Gray Elk.

Our two friends looked around them and presently saw Broncho Bob and Tom Texas sitting on the stone floor bound hand and foot.

"Hello, you sneaking hounds!" called out Yankee Pete, striding up to them. "How do you like ther way things have turned out? Ain't yer sorry you tackled us an' fell into the river with us? You know what's goin' ter happen to yer putty soon, don't yer?"

"Shot up!" answered Tom Texas, putting on as bold a front as he possibly could under the circumstances. "I reckon we'll all git out of this scrape all right if you fellers will keep your mouths shut."

"Ha, ha, ha!" and Pete laughed as though he really did enjoy it. "Wild, just tell ther old chief to take these fellers out an' put 'em to death. They tried hard to kill us, an' now they have got to die for it!"

The faces of the two villains paled at these words.

They saw that Wild and the peddler were free and they were mad.

That was enough to make them feel alarmed.

The chief looked on in a stolid manner, while the talk-

ing was going on, and when it ceased he turned to Wild and asked him what had been said.

Our hero told him what he thought was necessary, under the circumstances, and then added that he was pretty hungry and would like something to eat for him and his friend.

The red man shook his head, and then placing his fingers to his mouth, gave a whistle.

Though Wild did not quite understand this movement he thought it meant for some one to appear, who would go and get them food.

But he was much mistaken.

Instead of a servant coming in, half a dozen young chiefs came through the arched doorway bearing stout thongs in their hands.

In the twinkling of an eye they pounced upon our two friends.

Wild knocked two of them down, and the Yankee sent one of them rolling over the stone floor.

But that did not stay the Indians, and after a short struggle they were made prisoners.

Young Wild West was in quite a rage.

He had not expected to be treated that way after what had taken place, and he was mad at himself for not having given the old chief something to remember him by before he was rendered helpless.

The sudden turn of affairs made Broncho Bob and his friend quite gleeful for the time being.

They now felt that they stood as good a show as Young Wild West, though, when they came to think of it, that was not much of a show, since being bound hand and foot in a low stone building was anything but encouraging.

Our two friends were dragged over alongside the two villains, and then the old chief started to leave the place.

Wild called him back.

"You had better set us free," he said, speaking in the Indian tongue. "I am sure that you will find that it will be all the better for you if you do."

Though the words seemed to make a slight impression on him, Harrawanda went out, leaving two of his braves to guard the prisoners.

It was not over a couple of minutes before Broncho Bob spoke.

"What do you think they will do with us, Mr. West?" he asked in a tone that was full of anxiety.

"I guess you had better wait and find out. I don't care to express my opinion to such as you," replied the boy, who now felt like clutching the villain by the throat and choking him for bringing all the trouble upon them.

"Oh! you needn't git so hot-headed about it. If we was both standin' up in here with our hands an' feet free mebber you wouldn't talk like that."

"You think so, eh? Well, I'll try and fix it with the chief to set us free for a little while; then we can settle it. You are nothing but a great big bluffer, and the next time we have any difficulty you want to be prepared to step off this earthly sphere, so to speak, for I shan't hesitate to down you the same as I would a rattlesnake. You under-

stand me perfectly now, Mr. Broncho Bob. I'll do my level best to get the chief to set us free long enough to fight it out."

"I wish he would," was the retort, though the tone of the villain's voice showed that he did not mean it.

The truth of it was that he was in deadly fear of Young Wild West.

Nothing but compulsion would ever make him stand up and fight him face to face.

In a little while four rather comely looking Indian maidens came in the temple, as such it might be called, each bearing a wooden bowl.

In the bowls was a kind of mixture that smelled very appetizing to the prisoners, all of whom being rather hungry, since they had eaten nothing since breakfast and the afternoon was now fast waning.

There was a big wooden spoon sticking in the bowls, and getting down upon their knees, the maidens proceeded to feed the captives.

Wild had eaten all sorts of cooking, so he was not afraid to try this.

Pete hesitated, but when he saw his companion take hold he allowed himself to be fed, also.

"Lamb stew, ber gosh!" he exclaimed. "That's ther first time I've tasted ther dish in moren' a year! Gee! but ain't I hungry!"

They all did ample justice to the meal, and when the bowls were pretty well cleaned out the girls retired, only to return a minute or two later with gourds full of fresh water.

A good drink sufficed to make them feel better. Pete began to get drowsy right away, and, as was his usual custom when he had the chance to, he soon fell to snoring.

"He is not one to borrow trouble, anyway," thought Wild. "Well, I guess he is about right, though I don't feel much like going to sleep just now."

No one came in after the girls went out with the gourds the prisoners drank from, and the time wore on till finally the sunset and it began to grow dark in the temple.

The only thing to break the monotony for the past hour or two had been the mule which had walked in and out of the place two or three times.

The animal seemed to be privileged to go where and when he pleased, and Wild could not help envying him.

Though the two cowboys had tried to converse with him several times, the young Prince of the Saddle refused to have anything to say to them.

Just as it got real dark in the temple Yankee Pete awoke with a start.

"Time to light up, I guess, an' git ready for business," he said. "Gosh! I thought I was in Weston, an' here I am in a stone jug with my hands an' feet tied. Hello, Wild!"

"Hello!" was the reply. "I am right here within a couple of feet of you."

Before they had time to say anything further a handsome Indian maiden bearing a flaming torch entered the temple and walked toward its center.

Close behind her came the Yankee's mule as if he had an idea the girl was going to give him something to eat!

CHAPTER VII.

WILD'S HAT IS FOUND.

Jim Dart and the rest of Young Wild West's friends in Weston were a rather sorry lot that night.

Wild was missing and there was no trace of him.

Arietta Murdock, the pretty postmistress, was the worst of all, as far as worrying was concerned.

It was an unusual thing for her young lover to leave town for more than a day without coming to her and bidding her good-by.

And the fact of his going away without his dinner made it appear all the more strange.

"It is a queer thing for him to do," said Jim Dart. "I have known Wild for a long time, and I never knew him to do anything like that before of his own accord. It looks to me as though he has been captured and carried off."

"It does look that way; but who could have done it?" asked Cheyenne Charlie.

"Well, I don't know who could have done it. That's where the puzzle grows more difficult to solve."

While they were talking, Jack Robedee came in. Jack had just come from the supply store, and by the looks of his face he had some news.

"Heard anything?" questioned Jim, anxiously.

"Yes," was the quick reply. "The two cowboys I saw go down the canyon after Wild and the peddler have not showed up."

"Is that so?" cried Jim, jumping to his feet. "That means that there has been some crooked work. Broncho Bob and the fellow with him are responsible for Wild and the peddler being missing, just as sure as you are alive!"

"That's what I think," said Jack. "Ther feller with Broncho Bob is named Tom Texas. Ther rest of ther band have spent about all their money an' have pitched a camp just over to ther other side of ther town. Jim, let's you an' Charlie an' me take a walk over there an' try to git something out of 'em? Maybe they know something about this disappearance."

"That is a good suggestion, Jack. We will go at once. Come on, Charlie."

The three had been sitting on a big log in front of the office, and they now got up and started for the camp of the cowboys.

They, of course, thought there might be a little trouble before they got back, but they were prepared for it.

In such towns as Weston a person must always be prepared for trouble, for even if he did not make it himself some one else was liable to.

Jim led the way, thinking surely that they would strike some sort of clue by going there.

Wild's friends were so much worked up over his strange

disappearance that it would not take much to make them fight that night.

All that was necessary was to make them have a suspicion that some one knew what had happened to the young Prince of the Saddle, and the business would be started.

As the trio walked through the town they were asked several times by friends if Wild had showed up yet.

This only increased their anxiety concerning him, and made them more than ever determined to find him.

Pretty soon they came to the cowboy camp.

Two or three fires were burning to give them light and they were seated around them playing cards.

They had no tents to sleep in; the starry vault of the heavens was sufficient for them, so long as it did not rain.

As our three friends approached, one of the cowboys, who might have been acting in the capacity of sentinel, came forward to meet them.

"What's ther matter?" he demanded rather roughly.

"Who is the boss of this camp?" asked Jim, ignoring his demand entirely.

"I don't know, 'thout it's Lunkhead Luke. Luke, you're wanted."

The wiry little fellow who bore the name that was not at all suggestive to him, got up and came out of the gang around the fire.

"What's wantin'?" he inquired in a tone that was pretty close to being civil.

"We come over here to see if you could tell us what has become of Broncho Bob and Tom 'Texas,'" retorted Jim. "We've got an idea that you know where they are, and what they were up to when they quit the town to-day at noon."

"You've got an idea that's wrong, then!" exclaimed Lunkhead Luke. "We've been worryin' all ther afternoon about Bob an' Tom. Couldn't tell you where they went for ther life of me! I ain't compelled to say this, but I will, 'cause Young Wild West is missing, an' it looks as though our two men went off ther same time he did."

"We know that much now," and Jim moved a little closer to the wiry man. "We know that the last seen of Young Wild West and the Yankee peddler was shortly after twelve to-day, and they were being followed by Broncho Bob and Tom Texas. Now, then, you don't know what that means! It seems that if your two friends show up and our friends don't there will be a hanging, and Broncho Bob and Tom Texas will play the principal part in the game."

"I understand what you mean perfectly: but I don't know any more about ther business that you do. All's I know that two of our gang is gone, an' we'd like to have 'em back very much."

The voice he spoke in suggested to Jim that he was not telling the truth all the way through, so acting on a sudden impulse, he whipped out his revolver and placed it under the cowboy's nose.

"Do you fellows want to have a picnic around here with hot food instead of cream?" he said calmly.

"What yer mean?" asked Lunkhead Luke.

"Well, I mean that you know something about the disappearance of Young Wild West!"

"I don't! I swear I don't!" answered the man earnestly.

Jim was keeping a pretty good eye on the crowd, and so was Charlie and Jack, but before anything more could be said, one of the cowboys opened up the game by sending a bullet past Jim's ear.

Then the picnic young Dart had spoken of began.

There were just nine shots fired, and our three friends fired six of them!

Then it was all over.

Two cowboys were senseless upon the ground, and three more were wounded.

The blood was trickling from the left ear lobe of Jim Dart, where a bullet had grazed it, but Charlie and Jack had not been touched.

It was the cowboys who gave in.

They were not in the habit of stacking against such people as the friends of Young Wild West.

"Well, if you are all satisfied, come along with me," observed Jim, as he took Lunkhead Luke by the collar and pulled him away from the camp.

Not the least objection was raised, so the captain was marched straight to Brown's Gazoo.

The place was pretty full when the three came in. There were miners there who were drinking at the bar, and in the back room gambling was on in full force.

Jim marched up to the bar with his prisoner in such a way that no one knew the man was a prisoner.

He ordered drinks for the four, and Lunkhead drank whisky with a relish.

Then Jim gave him another.

He wanted to loosen his tongue, and he had heard that whisky was a good thing to do it.

"Now, Mr. Lunkhead," he said, after the fellow had downed the second drink, "I want to take you over to the office of the Wild West Mining and Improvement Company. You won't object, will you?"

"What's ther use of me objectin'?" retorted the fellow with a grin. "I don't suppose you are goin' to kill me, are you?"

"No, not just yet awhile, anyway. Come on!"

Jim no longer had his hand on the man at all. Charlie and Jack kept an eye on him and walked behind, so it would have been useless for him to have attempted to escape.

In a short time the office was reached, and Jim Dart unlocked the door.

Then the four went in and a light was struck.

"Sit down, Mr. Lunkhead," said Jim politely.

The cowboy obeyed.

"Now, what do yer want?" he asked uneasily.

"I want you to tell us what happened to Young Wild West! If you don't tell us all you know about his disappearance we will start in to carve you up alive! Your right ear will be sliced off first, then your left, and if you won't tell then we will start in on the finger of your right hand and keep on till you tell."

Lunkhead Luke thought that his captors really meant to treat him in that barbarous fashion.

But he could not tell what had happened to Young Wild West, because he did not know.

"I don't know no more about what happened to Young Wild West, or ther peddler, or ther two fellers what was with us than you do," he solemnly affirmed.

"What do you know about the case, then?"

"Nothin'!"

"Yes, you do!" and Jim pulled out his hunting knife and tested its edge on his thumb nail.

"Well, I'll admit that ther boys were all down on Young Wild West."

"Yes, especially Broncho Bob, I suppose?"

"Yep! that's right. Bob said we would have plain sailin' in this here town if Young Wild West was out of ther way, so he appinted himself an' Tom Texas a committee to attend to his case."

"Ah! Now we begin to see. So the committee have attended to him, then?"

"I don't know. We ain't seen or heard of 'em since they started out jist afore noon to-day."

"That is all you know about the case, then?"

"Yep!"

"Well, now, let me tell you something. You and your gang have just got twenty minutes to leave this town! If any of you ever show up here again you will be shot on sight! Do you understand that?"

"Yep!"

"All right, then. Now, light out!"

The cowboy did light out.

He started on a run for the camp and never stopped till he got there.

A few minutes later the outfit was heading for Devil Creek, much to the astonishment of some of the miners who had heard the men say that they were going to stop there permanently.

"We have learned something, anyhow, though it is not very encouraging," said Jim, as the three started for their homes. "At daylight in the morning we will ride down the canyon and search it thoroughly. If we fail to find the bodies of Wild and the Yankee you can depend on it that they are alive somewhere."

"Oh! I ain't got the least idea that he is dead," Cheyenne Charlie quickly answered.

"Nor me, either," added Jack Robedee. "Two such measly coyotes as them fellers was couldn't kill Wild if he was all alone, an' that peddler was a regular team all by himself."

These words had the effect of cheering the others up more than any that had been spoken that day.

They all realized that what Jack said was sound logic.

Such cowardly fellows as Broncho Bob and Tom Texas were not liable to get the best of Wild, even if he was alone.

He was capable of handling half a dozen men like them.

It was rather a sleepless night for the friends of Young Wild West; and all were glad when morning came.

Shortly after daylight Jim, Charlie and Jack mounted their horses and started up the canyon.

They had not gone over a hundred yards when they heard galloping hoofs behind them.

Turning, they were surprised to see Arietta Munlock, Eloise Gardner and Charlie's wife riding along after them.

Arietta had got the other two to ride with her in search of her lover!

"What does this mean?" asked Cheyenne Charlie as the three ladies rode up.

"It means that we are going out to look for Wild, and that we are not coming back till we find him," answered Arietta.

I think you would be better off home. Anna, why did you say that we were going this morning? It must have been you who told Arietta."

"I could not help telling her," was Anna's reply. "I knew she was worrying terribly over Wild's disappearance, and I thought it might do her good to tell her."

"And it got her in ther notion to come along with us," spoke up Jack Robedee. "I suppose you gals have all got yer shooters with yer?"

"Yes. We were going to bring our rifles, too, but thought it hardly necessary."

"You can't tell about that. They are liable to come in handy almost any time when you are away from home, and some times when you are home," observed Cheyenne Charlie, as he reined in his horse beside his wife.

Eloise fell in beside Jim, and Arietta took Jack for a companion.

All hands were as solemn as owls.

Had they been going to meet Young Wild West somewhere the air would have rung with their laughter.

But it seemed almost as though they were going to his funeral now.

He was missing, and they meant to find him if he was in the land of the living!

They rode along down the canyon along the bank of the rushing stream till they came to the point where it became lost underground.

They halted on the side opposite to where Wild and the others had tumbled in.

"That water rushes terribly swift, it seems," said Eloise.

"Yes," answered Jim, as he brought his horse to a halt. "I suppose if one was to fall in the stream anywhere close to the hole he would be sucked on down into the bowels of the earth."

"Wouldn't it be awful if Wild fell in there!"

As his pretty young sweetheart made this remark Jim gave a violent start.

His face turned a shade paler, too, and he began looking closely at the bank on either side.

Suddenly a cry left his lips.

"Look over there!" he gasped. "Look! It's Wild's hat!"

He pointed to an overhanging bank which almost touched the water, and there, sure enough, was the broad brimmed

and that Young Wild West had worn the day before when last seen!

A lump came into the throat of Jim, and the tears welled to his eyes.

"That explains all," he said sadly. "Now, we know what has become of Wild. Those treacherous hounds must have got the best of Wild and the Yankee and pushed them in the water."

"No, no!" almost screamed Arietta, who was beside herself with grief at the mere thought of such a thing. "I cannot believe that Wild is dead. I will not believe it till I see him lying dead before my very eyes."

They remained there for the next five minutes, and all sorts of conjectures were made, but no one knew just what to do.

The hat could not be reached from that side of the stream, so Jim rode back far enough, and then dismounting, he left his horse there and leaped over the stream.

He ran back, and with the aid of a stick succeeded in getting the hat.

Then it was that he noticed where the bank had crumbled away.

"There has been a fight here," he thought, "and some one went into the water. I wonder if this stream comes out anywhere in daylight again? We must try and follow in the direction it takes and see."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE INDIAN PRINCESS SHOWS HER LOVE.

As Young Wild West saw the Indian maiden coming in the temple with the flaming torch in her hand, he gave a start.

He knew the girl!

Her name was Tripping Fawn.

She had come to him with a message from her grandfather, old Gray Elk, the Sioux chief.

The message had been to the effect that the chief was dead, and before dying he had left a legacy to Wild, in return for sparing his life some days before that.

Wild had smiled upon Tripping Fawn when she brought the message to him and made the pretty Indian maiden happy.

He had talked to her in the way that Indians like to be talked to, not thinking that he was working his way into her heart at the time.

No! Young Wild West was not the sort to make love to any girl but his own Arietta, the fair equestrienne who had captured his heart months before.

He had thought no more about Tripping Fawn, beyond the fact that he was glad she had brought the message to him, since it had enriched him a few thousand dollars.

And now when he saw the girl he could scarcely believe his eyes.

She was attired in the most gorgeous finery he had ever seen an Indian wear.

Heavy golden bracelets were about her wrists, and a string of dazzling stones hung about her neck.

Wild winked to make sure that his eyes did not deceive him and looked again.

There was no mistake about it. The maiden was Tripping Fawn.

The girl stuck the flaming torch in a socket that was in a sort of stone altar in the center of the big chamber, and the mule, who had followed her in, turned and came over to his master.

As the animal reached down and sniffed at Yankee Pete's head, the Indian maiden let her glance go that way.

The instant Young Wild West caught her eye he exclaimed:

"Tripping Fawn!"

She uttered a stifled scream when she heard this, and then came over that she might better be enabled to see the speaker.

"I am Young Wild West, Tripping Fawn," said our hero. "I came to this strange valley because I could not help myself. I was borne here by a powerful and dark stream of water. The man next to me and myself were pushed into the water by the bad men you see beside us. We could not get out, and at last found ourselves swimming in a little lake. Then we came here. Why are you here, pretty Tripping Fawn?"

The girl had listened to every word he had said with the greatest attention.

She had been at Fort Bridger so long that she had learned to speak and understand English.

"Tripping Fawn is surprised to see the young paleface brave here," she answered, speaking slowly and in a very low voice. "She never expected to see him again, and now her heart is glad."

Wild nodded.

"How did you get here, Tripping Fawn?" he asked.

"Gray Elk marked upon the dried skin the way to get here before he died. Then he marked upon the dried skin the way for you to find the gold. Tripping Fawn came here; did the young paleface brave find the gold?"

"Yes, I found it. But tell me, Tripping Fawn, how did your grandfather know of this place?"

"He and three more big chiefs of the Sioux knew of it; that's all. I come with the dried skin and the writing of Gray Elk on it, and Harrawanda make me a princess right away and give me fine clothes to wear. I am the third maiden to come here from the outside in the past year. We all princess—all alike."

"I am very glad to hear this, Tripping Fawn. I want you to get us out of this scrape."

The girl shook her head.

"Tripping Fawn fix it so you no get killed," she answered. "She go and see Harrawanda now."

"Gosh! but you don't know how good I feel to hear that talk you had with ther Indian gal," observed Yankee Pete when she had gone. "My old mule consoled me until he

got me into pretty good spirits, but when I found that you an' ther princess, as she called herself, was acquainted I made up my mind that we'd come out of this all right."

"You ain't goin' to go ag'in us, are you?" asked Tom Texas in a pleading tone.

"You didn't do against us, did you, when you tackled us on the bank of the strange stream?" was Wild's answer.

"We are sorry for what we done; a man kin repent of his sins, you know."

"I don't believe that such as you can."

"Of course they couldn't," chimed in Pete. "Them fellers is jist like ther sailor. When it stormed an' he thought his boat was goin' to ther bottom of ther sea he called on ther good Lord; an' as soon as ther storm was over an' everything was all right ag'in, he called on ther devil."

"I thought you fellers had more heart in you than you have," spoke up Broncho Bob in a whimpering voice. "You couldn't turn ag'in us an' see us killed, could yer?"

At this juncture Tripping Fawn came back, accompanied by two more maidens who were as pretty and graceful as she was.

All three were attired alike, and they looked picturesque enough in the unsteady light east out by the flickering torch on the altar.

The three Indian princesses walked up to Wild and Pete, and then Tripping Fawn produced a knife from the folds of her loose-fitting robe and cut the thongs that bound them.

"Thank you, Tripping Fawn!" exclaimed Young Wild West. "May your eyes always shine as bright as the stars, and may you never know a care or pain. I shall never forget you, Tripping Fawn."

Then something happened that surprised every one!

The beautiful princess suddenly threw her arms around Wild's neck and kissed him!

He did not try to pull himself away from her, as he knew the nature of a Sionx Indian only too well.

For the first time he realized that Tripping Fawn was in love with him.

There was only one thing to do, and that was to humor her to a certain extent.

But he soon found that it would be easier than he expected, for the other two maidens, as soon as they could recover from their astonishment, sprang forward and pulled the girl almost roughly from the handsome young paleface she loved so madly.

There was considerable jabbering in their own tongue for the next two minutes, and our hero picked up enough of it to know that when a maiden once became a princess in the valley she was never to marry.

That made him feel all right.

He could now work the thing along by degrees, until at last he got a chance to leave the valley.

There must certainly be a way to get out, else how could Tripping Fawn get in?

That was the way Wild argued to himself.

"I must make her believe that her love is returned until she tells me the way to get out of the valley, and then——"

He dropped it right there, because the face of Arietta came before him at that moment, and that was enough.

"You must not show your love for me here, Tripping Fawn," Wild whispered in the ear of the princess as they walked out of the temple. "It is against the rules of the tribe. If you love me so much you must wait and tell me when none of your people can see you."

"I must not love you, or anyone else," she answered. "It must not be."

Our hero knew that it should not be, but he was acquainted sufficiently with life to know that when an Indian maiden once gives her love to a man it never changes.

She may wed another according to the sacred and binding rites of her tribe, but there will always remain a spark of the old love in her breast.

And he knew that his hope of getting out of the strange valley lay in the love Tripping Fawn had for him.

The Indian village was lighted up by fires here and there, and besides these, there were torches blazing in front of the wigwams.

As our two friends followed the girls out into the open air the mule came along, too.

Pete was so elated at being released, that he got upon the back of the animal, and before Wild was aware of it he set him off on a mad gallop around the village.

Tripping Fawn led the way to the biggest and most elaborate of all the wigwams, which was the one where Harrawanda held his councils with a few of the head chiefs of the tribe.

At the call of the princess the old chief stepped out.

He did not seem to be particularly pleased at seeing Wild free, but he welcomed him, nevertheless.

"How?" he said, which is the Indian way of saying "how do you do?" when shaking hands.

As Harrawanda knew nothing of English, Wild concluded that Tripping Fawn must have told him to say "how?" when she brought the young paleface brave before him.

The chief then went on to tell our hero that neither he nor any other white person who chanced to get there, could ever leave the valley.

They must live there and die there!

He also stated that it was through Tripping Fawn that they were allowed to live.

"The other two white men must have the same chance as you," the old chief went on to say. "If they are your enemies you must fight with them, the same as all men do."

Then he asked where Pete was, and when he heard that he was riding around on the mule he got interested, and called the chiefs in the wigwam out to see the performance.

The Yankee was riding around to his heart's content.

He felt so good over his release that he wanted to do something, and riding a mule was a good change from sitting on a hard stone floor with his hands and feet tied.

He got through after a while, however, and then dismounting, allowed the mule to go where he pleased, the same as the animal had been doing since he had been in the strange valley.

A little later the two were shown to a tepee by one of the young bucks, which he informed them was for their use.

Wild looked in and found that it was perfectly clean and well supplied with skins and new straw.

There was also a small supply of dried meat and fish, and an earthen bowl filled with corn meal.

"That reminds me that I am hungry," said Pete, looking at the food by the aid of the light that came from a fire not many feet distant.

"Go ahead and broil some meat or fish, then," replied Wild. "It is here for us to eat, and I am satisfied that it is clean enough."

"Will you eat some of it?"

"Yes, I am a trifle hungry. Why shouldn't I eat it? It is the best we can do just now, and there is no need of our starving."

"Gosh! I reckon not," and Pete selected what he wanted of the meat, and spitting it, went over to the fire and proceeded to cook it.

A few minutes later the two sat down to a fairly good meal.

"I'll make some Injun cakes in the mornin'," Yankee Pete said as he took a seat on a log in front of the tepee. "I wished I had a pipe an' tobaccoer."

"There is plenty of tobacco growing here," answered Wild. "Why don't you go and ask one of the reds for some? You must have your old pipe in your pocket somewhere."

"Gosh! I believe I have. Ain't I glad I spoke to you about it. Now, for a smoke."

He tackled one of the young chiefs and soon made him understand what he wanted.

The result was that he was given a big bunch of tobacco leaves, some of which were dry and some damp and moist.

While Pete was rubbing some of the leaves till he got it fine enough for his pipe, Wild started in at making a cheroot.

He had seen the Mexicans do it, and it was not long before he had rolled up one that would answer the purpose.

All he had to do was to start slantingly from one end of the leaf and put the other end in his mouth, so it would not unroll.

He found the tobacco to be very good, and if it had not been for thoughts of Arietta and the others in Weston he would have enjoyed the smoke as well as any he had ever had.

An hour later, the two turned in, knowing that it was hardly necessary to keep a watch.

They were in full power of the Indians, so it would do no good, anyway.

CHAPTER IX.

WHAT HAPPENED TO BRONCHO BOB AND TOM TEXAS.

Wild and Yankee Pete slept pretty well that night, considering the fact that the chief had doomed them to stay in the valley all night.

But, of course, Young Wild West did not expect to stay there.

That did not trouble him in the least.

He meant to first find the way to get out, and then to go when the opportunity came.

Tripping Fawn would fix it for them. Of that he felt certain.

When the two awoke in the morning they found the village astir.

It was a little later than either of our friends had been in the habit of rising, but there was an excuse for it, as they had nothing whatever to do.

The mule had taken up his quarters near the tepee, and the moment his master came out he walked up and rubbed his nose on his shoulder.

"Good mornin', John," said Pete. "You're lookin' fine, 'cept that them fancy trappin's they put on yer are gettin' rather torn like. Go over an' hunt up some nice fresh grass for your breakfast, now!"

He gave the animal a slap, and away he went, as though he understood perfectly what was said to him.

Our two friends then went down to the spring a few yards distant, and took a good wash in the little basin that had been formed for just that purpose.

When they got back to their tepee they found a young buck standing with the haunch of a freshly killed fawn.

He handed this over to Wild and then walked away.

A minute or two later Tripping Fawn suddenly appeared, followed by one of the maidens of the tribe, who carried a supply of cooking utensils and salt.

The Indian princess did not say a word when Wild very graciously bade her good morning.

Evidently she was afraid her love for him would get the best of her again if she got talking with him.

He was just as well satisfied, and after thanking the copper-hued servant, who deposited the articles on the ground, he suggested to his companion that they get breakfast ready.

"Gosh! You jist bet I will!" cried the Yankee. "We'll have a rousin' good breakfast, too, I'll guarantee. Mebbe it won't be as good as your Chinese cook over in Weston could fix up, but I guess he couldn't do it any better with ther same stuff we've got here."

"I think you are right on that point. Go ahead and let's see what you can do. I'll leave it all to you, if you would rather have it that way."

"Of course I would rather have it that way. I'm a first-class cook, when I've got ther things to cook with. I like to do it, too."

This was very satisfactory to Wild, since he did not like to cook much, though he could do it well enough when the occasion required it.

Wild took a walk around while the Yankee was preparing the breakfast.

He had not walked very far before he saw Broncho Bob and Tom Texas cooking over a fire in front of a tepee.

"So they have been liberated and given the same show as we have, eh?" he thought. "Well, I suppose it is all

right enough. I wonder if Broncho Bob remembers what he said he would do when he got free?"

Though he walked pretty close to them, the men did not appear to notice him.

But he knew perfectly well that they saw him, though, and that made him smile to himself.

After awhile he heard Pete's squeaky voice calling him, so he turned and walked back to the tepee that had been allotted to them.

Again he passed the two villainous cowboys, but, as before, they did not notice him.

The breakfast the Yankee had prepared was all right, and Wild filled up with the food, eating fully as much as Pete did.

"Now, then," observed our hero, "I am going to take a stroll around, and incidentally try to find how Tripping Fawn got here from the mountains. You stay around here, Pete, and if you can't do anything else, amuse the Indians with your mule."

"All right, Wild. What you say I'll do, every time."

Young Wild West was still without any headgear, but he had a pocket comb with him always, and he had combed out his long locks, thus making him look fit to be presented to anybody.

He did not know just what tepee Tripping Fawn stayed in, but he had an idea, and he turned his steps that way.

He wanted the princess to see him.

Though he did not catch a glimpse of her as he walked to the end of the village, he was certain that she had seen him.

He now started leisurely off to the right, straight toward a towering cliff that reared high up toward the clouds.

This unbroken cliff was about a mile distant, and it struck Wild somehow that this was the direction to go in order to get out.

When he had walked along for perhaps about five minutes over an almost straight path that led through the rather thin woods, he suddenly heard footsteps behind him.

He turned and beheld the very one he expected to see.

Tripping Fawn had followed him!

The Indian maiden, or princess, as she now called herself, held in her hands a broad-brimmed hat made of dried straw and grass.

"Young Wild West must not go out in the sun without a hat," she said in her low musical voice. "Tripping Fawn has made one for him."

"Thank you, Tripping Fawn," said Wild, as he took the roughly made headgear and placed it on his head. "Now, then, I want you to tell me how you got here from the mountains."

"That I must not do," she cried in alarm.

"Come here and sit down. You said you loved the young paleface brave, Tripping Fawn, did you not?"

"I said it, but I must not say it again," she answered with a quiver of anguish in her voice.

"You can say it again; I like to hear you say it."

This was a hard thing for our hero to do, but he felt that it must be done, and that was all there was to it.

Deceiving a princess for the sake of getting back to one's home and friends was not such an awful thing to do, after all.

Wild took the girl's hand in his.

"Now, Tripping Fawn, tell me how you got here in the valley of the selected and favored Sioux race."

The tone of his voice was half commanding, half entreating.

The princess was breathing hard now, as though overcome with a great emotion, but Wild never once took his eyes from her.

"I will tell you," she said in a voice that was hardly above a whisper, "though I know I shall die for telling you. Follow this path till you can go no farther; then turn toward the rising sun and you will find the way I got here, and the way you can get out. Let me kiss the handsome paleface brave for the last time, for I know I shall die for telling the way out of the Mystie Valley. I will kiss him for the last time!"

She threw her arms around his neck and kissed him spasmodically, and then, with a cry that sounded like a wail of despair, she darted from the spot.

"Whew!" exclaimed Young Wild West, as he got upon his feet. "I wonder what Et would have said if she could have been here and seen that? I don't believe she ever gave me a kiss like that in her life."

The daring young scout was now so elated at what he had learned that he felt like dancing, whistling, or doing something equally childish to express his feelings.

But he was one who got his feelings under control very quickly, and in two minutes from the time the Indian princess had left him he was himself again.

"I'll go on and find this place where we can get out," he muttered. "And then I'll go back and let Pete know of my good luck. We will get out of here before to-morrow morning, as sure as my name is Young Wild West!"

Wild walked back to the village by a roundabout way, passing through the fields that were under cultivation, and making the bucks and squaws who were working there believe that he was greatly interested.

He came back to the village after being gone a little over an hour.

And he was just in time, as he found out immediately.

Chief Harrawanda was a lover of skill and fighting tactics, and he proposed that Yankee Pete and Tom Texas do battle to a finish with the weapons he selected, after he had seen their bandying words.

And both men had agreed to the proposition.

Wild got there just in time to see them facing each other with ancient looking tomahawks and clubs in their hands.

The chief was the master of the ceremonies, and saw to it that the tomahawks were in their right hands and the clubs in their left.

That was the way he wanted the battle to be fought, and that was the way it was going to be fought.

Wild stepped up to the Yankee and whispered in his ear:

"Be sure and beat him, for I have found the way out of here, and to-morrow by this time we will be back in Weston!"

That was quite enough to spur Pete on to victory, though he never once thought of such a thing as defeat.

The man he was going to fight was a coward, and had proven himself so.

That was sufficient to make him confident, as he was anything but a coward himself.

Harrawanda gave the word to go ahead, and they did so.

Both went at it rather cautiously, and this seemed to please the chief.

Evidently he liked to see scientific fighting.

After ducking and jumping about for about half a minute, Pete made a clip at the cowboy with his club.

The blow just missed the scoundrel, and he became more cautious than ever.

The next attempt he made the Yankee succeeded in grazing his opponent's head with the tomahawk, drawing a good sized lump on his skull.

This delighted the chief, and made Broncho Bob, who was anxiously watching the contest, feel rather nervous.

Perhaps he was thinking that his turn would come next, and that Young Wild West would be his opponent.

As soon as he felt the pain, Tom Texas grew enraged, and started in to end the fight in short order.

With a quick blow from his club he succeeded in knocking the tomahawk from Pete's hand!

The best of men will get caught napping sometimes, and as it was with the Yankee then.

But he did not back down a bit. He still had his club, and he had to finish the fight with that.

The cowboy made another rush at him, but this time the Yankee leaped nimbly aside, and as his foe was passing he dealt him a blow on the head that laid him senseless upon the ground.

That ended the fight, for the chief at once interfered.

"Let him live," he said to Wild. "He may be a better man."

"Well, it is our turn now, I suppose," our hero said, as he walked over and faced Broncho Bob.

"I wish we had one of these apiece that was loaded with dry cartridges," retorted the cowboy, as he pulled out a revolver that he had managed to keep during the thrilling rush through the subterranean stream.

"I wish we had, I am sure."

The chief seemed to be interested when he saw the revolver in Broncho Bob's hand.

"He would rather fight with the white man's guns, would he?" he remarked.

"Yes," answered Wild, who could understand him quite well. "Yes, he says he would like to fight me that way, but he knows he can't, because his revolver can't be made to go off. It was in the water too long."

At this Harrawanda gave a nod and walked away rather hurriedly.

In a minute or so he returned, carrying with him two revolvers.

"Tripping Fawn bring them to me from Gray Elk," he said. "They are ready to throw fire, but I don't know how to make them. You fight the big white man with them."

Broncho Bob could understand just enough of the lingo to know what was expected of him.

He was a coward, but there are times when even a coward can become brave, or desperate, we should say.

His face turned pale, but he stepped forward and said he was willing to fight with the revolvers.

The chief handed him one and then gave the other to Wild.

"Back away six paces, and when the chief gives the word let yourself go!" exclaimed Young Wild West. "One of us has got to die, it seems."

The cowardly cowboy knew there was no help for him now.

He had to fight, so he nerved himself to drop the handsome boy before him.

When they were standing twelve paces apart the chief made them understand that he would like them to rush toward each other and shoot when he gave the word.

"You understand, don't you, Mr. Broncho Bob?" asked the boy.

"Ye-e-es!" came the reply.

"Well, then, get ready!"

The next moment the chief gave the word.

Three shots rang out in rapid succession, and Broncho

Bob fell on his face, while Young Wild West walked over and handed the chief the revolver.

He had not been touched, though the villain had taken two shots at him.

"He was about the quickest firer I ever met," observed Wild to Pete. "But his aim was not good. That's why I am alive here."

"I knowed that if you only shot once it would be all over with him. You killed your man, and I didn't, though."

"Well, I only killed him because I had to. He tried to kill me when I was not looking, and I dropped him when he had an equal chance with me."

"That's right. He's cashed in his chips, an' that's what he ought to have done long ago."

The cowboy had dropped his revolver when he fell, and as Wild noticed it lying on the ground, he contrived to move over where it was and pick it up without being seen by the Indians.

He had given the other one to the chief, and felt that this one might come in real handy, as there were four loaded chambers in it yet.

One of the Indian doctors worked hard with Tom Texas and finally managed to bring him to.

But the blow from the club had affected his brain, and if he lived through it he would be a drivelling idiot the rest of his days.

That was an awful punishment for the scoundrel, but he was deserving of almost anything.

For some reason the chief wanted Wild and Pete to stay right in the village the best part of the day.

He told them that they must learn to abide by the rules of the tribe and dress their way, as there was no hope for them of ever getting away.

"All right," answered Wild. "We will do just as you say, then. You need not have any fear of us trying to get away, because we would not know the right direction to take. I suppose that is the way to get to the top of the mountains, ain't it?" and he pointed to just the opposite way that he knew was the right one.

He had found steps cut in the rocks at the spot where Tripping Fawn had sent him, and that was enough to satisfy him that they could get out.

The chief shook his head when Wild pointed out to him, and said nothing.

That meant that he could not be pumped.

But the redskin turned a moment later, and pointing toward the temple-like edifice, said:

"If you would learn a way to leave the valley, go there and you will find a cavern of fire. To burn up will be to leave the valley!"

Young Wild West could understand this pretty well, and he at once became curious to find out how the cavern of fire looked.

"What do you think of that, Pete?" he said, turning to the Yankee. "There is a cavern of fire somewhere around here."

"Where is it?" asked the peddler.

"In the place where they took us when they first brought us here."

"In ther flat buildin' over there?"

"Yes."

"I never seen anything that looked like a cavern of fire there."

"Neither did I, but you know we never explored th place."

"I never thought of that."

"Well, perhaps old Harrawanda would not want us to do it, if we tried it without his knowledge. I am going to tell him that we are going into the temple and take a look at the cavern of fire."

"Go ahead. If we expect to git out of ther valley putty soon we might as well see all there is to be seen in it."

Wild now walked over to the chief.

He soon made him understand that they wanted to go in the temple and look around.

Harrawanda nodded as much as to say, "Go ahead: you are welcome to look around all you please, but don't imagine that there is a way to get out of the valley there."

The chief seemed to admire the handsome white boy more than ever since he had disposed of Broncho Bob in such handy fashion.

It might have been that he had noticed that the princess, Tripping Fawn, was in love with him, too.

At any rate, he made no move to stop them when Wild and Pete walked over to the temple.

"I should not think that there was any cavern of fire anywhere around here," our hero observed as he peered in the doorway. "Pete we ought to have a light to explore this place. It is dark in the corners."

"Why can't we use one of them torches over there?"

The Yankee pointed to a pile of them right to the left on the inside of the building.

"We can."

The next minute Pete had lighted one of the torches, and then holding it out before him, he led the way to the darkest recesses of the place.

CHAPTER X.

THE CAVERN OF FIRE.

A strange stillness pervaded the curious building, and the Yankee shrugged his shoulders uneasily.

"I wonder when this ranch was built, anyway?" he observed.

"A long while ago, I should say," replied Young Wild West. "It is a place of worship, or rather was. The altar there has no doubt been knelt before many times by Indians who lived ages ago. There are lots of similar places to this in Mexico, but this is the first time I ever knew that one existed up here in Dakota."

"Well, who knowed that this valley existed? There's lots of things that exist that we never heard of, I reckon."

"You are right there, Pete."

"Well, let's find this here cavern of fire an' git out of here. If we are goin' to leave at sunset we want to git ready."

To the darkest corner of the big place Wild led the way. Images of stone were to be found here on every hand, some of which were whole and in good condition, and others that were broken and chipped off in places.

By dint of searching about our hero found a stone door that looked as though it had been a long time since it had been opened.

"Let's see what there is the other side of that," he said to the Yankee.

"All right," was the rejoinder. "How are we goin' to open it?"

"Push against it; I don't see any other way."

Pete promptly placed his shoulder against the door and gave a shove.

The next instant he gave a cry and went through like a hot!

The door flew back in its place, and Wild was alone in the temple.

"Hello, out there!" came the peddler's voice from the other side.

Before Wild could answer the door opened toward him and Pete came out.

"It's all right," he said. "I wasn't expectin' it to give so easy. It opens from both ways. Come on in!"

He pushed and it opened comparatively easy, our hero following him through.

The moment he got there Wild noticed a draught of warm air.

"This is the way to the cavern of fire, I guess," he observed. "I can feel the heat from it."

"So can I. There's a flight of steps there. Are you goin' down 'em?"

"Yes; there's no other way to go, unless we go out."

Young Wild West was becoming more curious than ever.

That such a place could exist there was a mystery to him.

One thing was certain: the present inhabitants of the valley had never constructed the temple.

How, then, had it been built?

But there was no time now to figure on this question. Wild was anxious to know where the flight of steps led to.

Unhesitatingly he started down them.

For fifty steps our friends went down, and they could not see the bottom yet.

The daring young scout waited till another fifty had been traveled, and then came to a halt.

He noticed that the air was growing warmer all the time, too.

"Pete," said he, "what are you thinking about now?"

"I'm expectin' to see old satan appear every minute," was the reply. "It's too bad that Broncho Bob ain't alive an' here with us; we could send him on ahead."

"Well, come on. We may as well see it through now. There can't be over a thousand more steps to go down."

There were not many more to go, for when about thirty had been left above and behind them they found themselves in a long, narrow passage.

There was a faint light in the farther end of it, and Wild pressed on to see where it came from.

One minute more and they were approaching a broad cavern which must have been directly beneath the temple.

It was now so light that the torch was not needed, but Wild did not extinguish it.

The next instant they walked out into the cavern and found such a heat there that they involuntarily drew back into the passage.

But Wild quickly stepped back again and looked downward where the light came from.

Far beneath him a smoldering, fitful fire was burning.

As the two stood watching it in astonishment an occasional burst of flame would come up a number of feet and then vanish into nothingness.

"The valley seems to be right on top of a subterranean volcano," said Wild. "Some of these days it will be swallowed up."

"Are the palefaces going to leave the valley?"

This question was asked in the tongue of those who lived in the hidden valley, and turning, our two friends beheld Harrawanda, the chief, standing behind them.

He had followed them to the cavern of fire.

"No, chief," replied Wild. "I guess we don't want to leave you by this route—not much!"

The Indian understood what he said enough to cause him to smile in his peculiar way.

Then he nodded for them to follow him back to the temple.

Casting another look into the fiery pit, they obeyed him.

There was something awe-inspiring about the place, anyway, and they both longed for the open air and the bright sunshine again.

"Well," thought our hero, "the old fellow thinks I don't know the way to get out of the valley, but I do. I shan't go by the way he says, though, for I never did feel as though I would like to leave the earth through a blaze. Fire is something I dread."

It was rather a tedious climb up the many steps, and when they at length reached the temple, both our friends uttered a sigh of relief.

But they were satisfied that of all the strange things they had seen in the valley since they had entered it by means of the underground stream, the cavern of fire was the queerest and grandest of all.

And they had not heard of it till they were on the eve of going away, or making the attempt to go away, at least.

But somehow Young Wild West felt confident that they were going to succeed.

When he had a feeling that he was going to do a thing he always did it.

They left the temple with the chief and went straight to the habitation that had been allotted to them.

The Indians were getting ready to bury Broncho Bob.

They were going through the same performance that they did when one of their own race died.

Wild got interested and walked closer to them.

The redmen did not notice him at all, but kept right on.

They were sewing the body in various wide strips of some sort of material, each of which was of a different color.

They kept winding the strips around, sewing them as they went, until at last there was nothing to be seen but the head.

Then a signal was given by the master of ceremonies, and two Indian youths appeared carrying a sort of tray on which was a lot of clay mixed to the consistency of dough.

"I guess they are going to take a mold of Broncho Bob's face," observed Pete.

"Probably to present me with, in order that I may remember that it was his life or mine, and that I had to drop him," Wild answered.

Wild knew that the Indians were not making a mold of the dead villain's face.

Two of the redskins picked up handfuls of the clay, and rolling the stuff out, proceeded to cover the dead cowboy's face.

They worked quickly, and soon had it all covered from sight.

But not satisfied with this, they kept piling the clay on,

and soon the body had lost all semblance to human shape.

This took some little time, as the workers did not seem to want to hurry things, and when it was done, one of them, who was evidently a priest, held up his hand.

Then six men bearing a litter appeared.

The remains of Broncho Bob were placed on this, and with a sort of chant coming from their lips, the bearers marched off to where a grave had just been dug.

A number of the inhabitants followed, so Wild and Pete thought they would go, too.

They had only gone a little distance, however, when Harrawanda came up to them and shook his head in the negative.

"So we can't go, then?" our hero asked.

"No."

"How is that? You say we are to live here always. Why can't we see a body buried?"

"The man was killed by your hand," answered the chief, plain enough for Wild to understand.

"Oh, that is the rule here, is it?"

Harrawanda nodded.

"Well, this is a mighty strange place," observed the Yankee. "I wouldn't want to stay here as long as I live—not by a jugful!"

"It would be tiresome," answered the boy, who was even then thinking of the plan he had laid to get away at sunset.

They went back to see how Tom Texas was getting on.

But he was nowhere to be found.

The medicine man had taken him to some secluded place to treat him for the injury he had received from Pete's club.

There was nothing more of interest in the place for our two friends now.

They must wait—just wait.

CHAPTER XI.

CONCLUSION.

It seemed a long time before the sun got down below the top of the mountains, but it did get there after awhile.

Young Wild West had been waiting patiently for this time to come, for he had decided that this would be the time when they would start to leave the valley.

"Pete," said he, "go and get the mule to give them a little exhibition with. When you have rode around the ridge a couple of times, turn off in the direction I told you about. But don't you start in till I have been gone ten minutes. Do you understand?"

"Certainly. After you have been gone ten minutes I will follow. That's all there is to it, I guess."

"Yes, that is all; only you must hold their attention, so they won't be apt to miss me."

"That will be easy enough, I guess."

They had eaten their supper, and Wild was walking about smoking one of the cheroots he had made from the tobacco.

Everything seemed quiet and contented in the Indian village when Yankee Pete started for the mule.

His riding was a wonderful thing to the Indians, and they never got tired looking at him.

Just as Pete mounted the mule Young Wild West made his way slowly from the village.

The time to go had arrived, and he could not think of such a thing as failing.

As soon as he reached the cover of the woods he went along a little faster, fearing all the time that the Indian princess might follow him.

And his fears were not groundless, either, for he had just reached the face of the cliff when he heard footsteps.

The next minute Tripping Fawn came in view.

She did not come close to him, but simply bade him a mournful farewell and disappeared.

Wild drew a breath of relief, and started for the point where the steps had been hewn in the rock.

He was half-way there when he heard the sound of galloping hoofs.

Yankee Pete was coming with his mule.

The next minute he came in sight, and riding up, dismounted.

"We can't take John with us, I guess?" he said, inquiringly.

"No," answered our hero. "He cannot climb a perpendicular wall."

"Well, good-by, John! You've been a good old mule, and I hope the Indians will treat yer right. Git ap!"

With that he hit the animal a slap and away he went through the bushes.

The two now lost no time in getting to the place where they were to ascend from the valley.

"Go first, Pete," said Wild.

"All right," was the reply, and up went the Yankee.

Wild started right after him, and when he was up about six feet he suddenly felt some one tugging at his ankles.

Looking down, he saw one of the Indians, who had in some way seen them come there, and followed them.

The boy dared not let go his hold from above, so he knew what to do.

It was a situation that was enough to pale the stoutest heart.

It was quite possible that the brave who meant to drag Wild back to the ground had been ordered to watch him by the chief.

And he had come upon the two just in time to prevent the boy from making his escape.

"Let go!" cried Wild, speaking in the Indian tongue. "Let go, or I will kill you!"

But the brave did not let go; he simply clung all the tighter.

He had now succeeded in pulling the brave boy's toes out of the niches, and it was only a question of a few seconds before he would have him down.

And Yankee Pete up above Wild could do nothing!

In vain did Young Wild West try to kick the Indian off.

He was holding his own weight and that of the brave, too, by his fingers, and he could feel them slipping.

But no! He did not slip!

The report of a revolver cracked right beneath him, and with the death yell ringing from his lips, the Indian let go his hold and fell to the ground.

Then Young Wild West quickly regained his foothold and looked down.

In a fringe of bushes not ten feet from the body of the brave she had shot, stood Tripping Fawn, a still smoking revolver in her hand.

"Go on, Young Wild West!" she cried. "I was in time to save you."

"Farewell, bright-eyed Tripping Fawn!" he answered, his voice quivering with emotion, and then he hastened to climb the face of the cliff.

He was about half-way up to the ledge that would take them in safety from the place when a second report rang out from below.

Wild felt that he dared not look back, for he knew what it meant.

The Indian princess who had saved his life because she loved him, and knew she could never have him, had taken her own life!

One minute later Wild and the Yankee had reached the ledge.

The two shook hands without saying a word, and then hurried till they came to a steep ascent through a gorge.

It was tiresome work to make their way upward, but they never faltered; they wanted to get as far as possible from the valley before their escape was discovered.

Jim Dart gave the hat to Arietta as soon as he got around to where his friends were waiting.

The girl pressed it to her lips and broke into sobbing.

She could not believe that Young Wild West was dead, but yet it looked as though such was the case.

"Don't give up, Arietta," said Anna. "Something tells me that Wild is not dead, and that we shall find him. Be brave."

These words cheered the girl up considerably, and a minute later the party of six rode off in the hopes of finding the place the underground stream came to daylight in, if it did at all.

It was a long and tedious journey through the mazes of that canyon, but they stuck to it all day long without finding a stream of water save a little spring.

Though they had made many miles, they had not traveled very far—not over twenty miles, at the most.

Sunset came, and they halted on the side of a mountain to spend the night.

They were more determined than ever to find the stream, and they meant to continue the search as soon as another day came.

While Jack Robedee got supper ready, Jim and Charlie cut some pine boughs and arranged couches for the girls to rest on during the night.

It was not a very light-hearted party that sat down to the broiled venison steaks that Jack had cooked so nice.

But they had traveled since daylight, and they were hungry.

"Eat," said Cheyenne Charlie to the ladies. "You must eat to keep up your strength, you know."

"I could eat if Wild were only here," said Arietta, with tearful eyes.

"Can't you eat a little now?"

"No; by and by I may. Do not urge me, please."

They made the best of the supper, and Jack kept a piece of venison handy to cook for Arietta, in case she should want it.

Cheyenne Charlie tried to tell stories to pass the time away and get the thoughts of missing Wild West from the minds of all hands, but he made a miserable failure of it.

Two hours passed by.

Suddenly they were startled by a rushing, roaring noise off to their right.

Cheyenne Charlie sprang to his feet.

"An avalanche!" he cried. "It is a good thing for us that we are not in its path!"

There was a steady crash and a roar for about ten seconds, and then all was silent as before.

"It is over," said Jim Dart, quietly. "Charlie, do you know I would like to take a look where that awful pile of dirt and rocks slid from?"

"It can't be far from here, for I felt the earth jar when it went. Let's you an' me take a little climb on' see if we kin see anything of what happened."

This was settled, and leaving Jack in charge of the camp with the ladies, they walked away up the mountain side.

They were gone for more than half an hour, and Jack and the rest were just getting anxious when suddenly they heard footsteps.

Arietta sprang to her feet instantly.

Her face was aglow with excitement, and Robedee looked at her in alarm, thinking she was surely going crazy.

But the next instant he saw what was the matter.

A form bounded by him, and then he saw the girl in the arms of Young Wild West!

"We thought we would let him surprise you, Et." said the voice of Cheyenne Charlie. "We just found him a few minutes ago heading in an opposite direction. He will tell you all about it as soon as you give his mouth a chance to talk."

Charlie and Jim stepped into camp, followed by Yankee Pete, whose fishy eyes sparkled more than they had ever before.

"It's great, ain't it?" he said, solemnly.

There is but little more to tell.

When the avalanche took place, Wild and Pete had just descended and got safely out of its track.

That portion of the mountain they had come down was now no longer there.

Instead, perpendicular walls reared themselves, the same as on the other side, deep down into the mystic valley of the ancient Sioux.

To get back to that valley would be impossible, unless they went through the underground stream again.

Young Wild West knew that.

The party reached Weston late the following afternoon, and Young Wild West was no longer missing!

THE END.

Read "YOUNG WILD WEST AND THE DETECTIVE; OR, THE RED RIDERS OF THE RANGE" which will be the next number (9) of the "Wild West Weekly."

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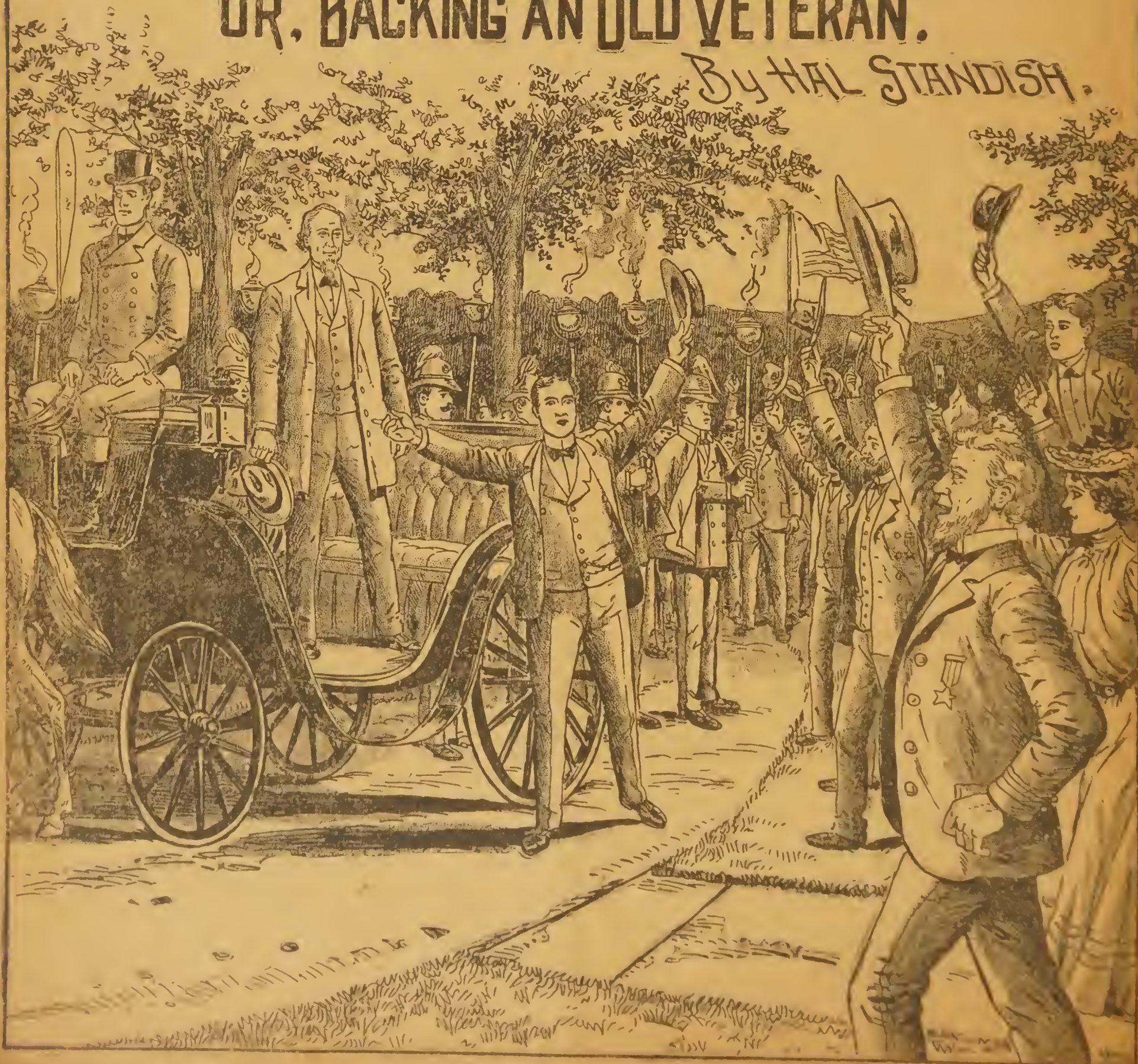
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